

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a> , <a href="#">Graphic Depictions Of Violence</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a> , <a href="#">F/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Kingdom Hearts</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Aseles/Sora</a> , <a href="#">Sora/Aseles</a> , <a href="#">Sora/Kairi</a> , <a href="#">Kairi/Sora</a> , <a href="#">OC/Sora</a> , <a href="#">Sora/OC</a>
Character:	<a href="#">Aseles</a> , <a href="#">Sora</a> , <a href="#">Kairi</a> , <a href="#">Riku</a> , <a href="#">Donald</a> , <a href="#">Goofy</a> , <a href="#">Mickey Mouse</a> , <a href="#">Leon</a> , <a href="#">Cid</a> , <a href="#">Cloud</a> , <a href="#">Yuffie</a> , <a href="#">Aeirth</a> , <a href="#">Merlin</a> , <a href="#">Yen Sid</a> , <a href="#">Axel</a> , <a href="#">Roxas</a> , <a href="#">Organization XIII</a> , <a href="#">Heartless</a> , <a href="#">Xemnas</a> , <a href="#">Ansem the Wise</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Video Game</a> , <a href="#">Fantasy</a> , <a href="#">Original Character - Freeform</a> , <a href="#">kingdom hearts - Freeform</a> , <a href="#">Kingdom Hearts II - Freeform</a> , <a href="#">Disney</a> , <a href="#">KeyBearer</a>
Series:	Part 1 of <a href="#">A Kingdom Hearts Story</a>
Stats:	Published: 2013-07-03 Updated: 2014-01-15 Chapters: 29/? Words: 195561

## ~::~A Kingdom Hearts Story (Finding Home)::~

by [KeyBearer](#)

### Summary

A young girl, Aseles©, finds her home world destroyed by unknown beings, and finds herself uniting unwillingly with the Hollow Bastion Committee. There, she has a strange connection with a boy named Sora, who shares the familiar sensation toward her. As they begin to travel, Aseles discovers this odd relationship developing for him, unaware where it could possibly lead her. However, it's the least of her problems when a new threat, Organization XIII, suddenly threatens to overtake the worlds and open a scared passageway called Kingdom Hearts and including Aseles in their plans.

Traveling along the journey, Aseles comes across visions, lies, spoils, and dangers that she will face in order to stop both the Heartless and the Organization. Suddenly, a man named Ansem the Wise comes into play, knowing more about Aseles's past than she does, pulling her into something she least expected.

Packed with suspense, drama, and power, Aseles is swirling in a plot that not only turns her world upside-down, but leaves her bewildered of who she really is.

### Notes

The first story I've made back in 2006. It's still going through modifications, so bear with me please.

I do not own Kingdom Hearts, but Aseles and partially some events that occur later on,

though they are based on the Kingdom Hearts 2 game.

I hope you enjoy nonetheless.

## Prelude/Introduction

Name: Aseles ©

Age: 15

Appearance: Aseles wears a simple, V-shirt and a pair of jeans with sneakers at the moment. She also had layered dark brown hair, and dimmed blue eyes.

Personality: Very determined and vivacious, she values friendships and speaks her mind when she finds the appropriate time. She follows her curiosity and impulsiveness, yet it does get her into deep trouble at times. It's very difficult for her to see the positives, though she's trying to keep them in mind in difficult situations. She tends keeps secrets and thoughts to herself, which soon land her into situations she cannot foretell or see.

*"Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. Love still stands when all else has fallen." - Unknown*

*Here you are, alone and afraid,*

*Letting the light of your soul begin to fade.*

*Here you are, cold and distraught,*

*Unknowing what you had realized, what you had sought.*

*At the end, you see a sparkle, a gleam,*

*Something you had seen in a lost dream.*

*Unbeknownst to you, you begin to walk,*

*Seeing the keyhole....and hearing a lock.*

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### THE BEGINNING:

The scenery seemed to be the usual, and it made her groan. Ordinary, nothing new, yet...a feeling of uneasiness was settling between her toes. Maybe it was the fact she had a stack of homework to do in her bulking backpack around her hunching shoulders, or the fact that she had just moved into to a place called Daylight Downtown. Heck, it was probably the massive chores to do at home as she were heading in the direction.

As for attire, she wore a pair of jeans with a belt to secure it in place, a plain blue shirt, and her usual, favorite shoes that were soon ripping from their soles. Her fingers clamped around the arms of the backpack and her sky eyes trailed across the ground like a robot. At that moment, she was suddenly anxious of something to occur, waiting for some type of phenomenon to brisk her away into something more. She took deep breaths, shaking the feeling out. It was probably nothing....

She continued to look at the ground in dullness with her usual pace, wondering how things really worked around here in this town. As she neared closer to her destination, there was a wrong of it all, as if nothing really existed, or it was vacant of some sort. No matter how much she thought about it, it didn't seem right to be here-

Suddenly her face bumped into something solid, and she flinched from the contact. She rubbed her forehead as a reaction and showed her eyes up, but the scene was odd to her. She narrowed her eyes....and the crowd was surrounding....

"What's going on?" she mouthed, and still couldn't believe that fact that everyone had gathered around her...house. She jumped once in the air to get a good look, peering into the close distance of the front yard. When she landed on her feet, she sprinted in a rush, pushing and making her way to the disintegrated house where hers once stood. Yes, it was burnt...all of it to the ground.

She gasped in despair as she made it to the front, immediately removing her backpack and tossing it aside to approach the black yard. Her ears rang of static, and everything seemed inaudible to her being. Nothing mattered, no one mattered but only this...her home, her possessions, her strength. She ignored the warnings of danger in front, but bent down to grasp a chunk of ash into her trembling hand. It drifted off between her fingers, and the sight of elimination began to commence inside her throat and eyes. She just stood there, staring, helpless, confused, paralyzed to the wits.

Suddenly a tight constriction behind her began, and she turned to face the consuming panic that arose from the ground. She viewed the strange beings that secluded her from the rest of this world, watching their ant-like antennas and sharp fingers of their black skins. Were they the ones that caused this tragedy? They were coming closer, and she stumbled to stand firmly. They made her weak, they made her crumble. They were the enemies, she just knew it, but what was going on? What were they!?

She did not flee, but stood motionless as the ant-like creatures approached leisurely from the ground. Reaching forward in a haste to do something useful, she swung her thrown backpack, hitting one of the creatures as it dodged back, and shot out a claw. In one swipe, it had cut her backpack to shreds. She stood her ground, the creatures blocking her only escape toward the running civilians. It could not end this way...

She gasped and felt a rumble below, then jumped in fright to see the pavement crack much like dry clay, and rise as the separate halves began to rise and sink. She tried to regain balance and felt her heavy breathing blur the rising scream in her quaking lungs. The creatures took no notice of the destruction, and pounced like leopards after prey. At the same time, the ground shattered completely, causing her to fall into the dark abyss. She closed her eyes, fearing the worst....

*The air was cold, and something below her made her shudder. The scene felt dark and alone, but something was definitely around, lurking within the shadows. She seemed to be laying on a platform, her eyes flickering madly as she inspected the glass floor she was on, shifting in such a variety of colors that it made her very heart sing. Finally, she cleared her mind and began to make herself stand, feeling quite vulnerable, as if something would pop out from the dark corners of the area. It seemed to be stretching on forever, this abyss of ebony....it was unnerving to her.*

*Aseles dropped her stare to the ground, and looked at her fists in front of her. She swallowed roughly, remembering, or trying to recall what happened moments before. There was...a fire....of some sort, that had taken place. She remembered she touched something very silky, and the object came to her mind: ashes. She looked to the ground again, the tears welling up at the corner of her eyes, knowing she had lost something very important....but she could not define what it was entirely on what was bothering her the most. Her family and friends were gone, but that's not why she was crying, oddly enough. It was something else....something else she was crying for...and she began to cry, not knowing what the hell it was.*

*Aseles backed up a couple of steps, wiping the tears off the edges of her eyes as she looked down to the colorful mosaic piece she was standing on, making out a figure of....a boy that seemed to be taking up most of the space of the ring. He had brunette hair, and his eyes were closed, and there*

*was a distinguishable crown necklace around his neck. Before she could inspect the rest, there was a long eerie, hum in the room. Aseles froze, and she began to look around, her chest heaving in turmoil.*

*"Who's there...?" she questioned to the dark domicile. She listened intently, not expecting a reply...but she received a booming voice.*

*"Can you feel Sora?"*

*"Can I feel...Sora?" she blinked, unsure of who that was. But...there was a certain chime to it...and she reached up to place her hand over the center of her chest. Precipitously, the same, weird beings arose from the ground, and Aseles was able to distinguish who they were immediately. They had surrounded her completely, and she swung her hand, feeling the need to, to scare them off when-*

*In her hand a bright shine of light blinded the area, and she closed her eyes as the creatures began to draw back from its arrival. After a few seconds, Aseles gasped, and felt the weight of something in her hand. She dropped a leg forward, but she straightened up to look at the weapon she held in hand, a sword of some sort that was shaped like a....key? What was this?*

*Aseles shot her livid eyes forward toward the creatures that kept themselves at bay, but a couple of seconds later they lunged in attack. Aseles wasted no time swinging the weapon in her hand, tossing it to and fro in front of her, catching several of the beasts as they dropped to black ash around her feet and face. The ground suddenly began to illuminate into darkness, and below she felt a strong pull of her feet. She whined greatly as she tried to climb herself out of the dark, drowning pit, scrambling her hands upward for something to pull her out. The weapon in hand vanished, and Aseles felt herself falling inside the slime of darkness, unable to find the light within...*

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Her head spun as she groaned, flickering her eyes, "Ugh....what happened? Where am I?" She looked about to find herself lying on a bed in a much decorated, green room. It looked like a hotel room, simple as that. At the corner near at the door, she spotted out a blurred figure, and had to blink several times to see it was a man who held his arms across his chest, with one foot pressed against the wall behind him. His spiky, blond hair gleamed in the light's shine and his eyes seemed to be looking at the ground, though she sensed he knew she was wide awake by now. His attire consisted of a black belt, black pants, and a shirt that with only one sleeve while the other showed his bare muscled arm.

"At Traverse Town," the man answered, making her jump in place. His voice sounded like ice. "I found you in the alley, so I brought you here," he said, He looked up finally, and she was left defenseless against his piercing eyes. It was seconds later when she noticed he had left his stance, and was walking now.

"Wh-"

"You were unconscious," the man interrupted and stood a few feet away. Aseles stood up as a reflex: who was this guy?

She gathered some words, "Well, thanks..." She turned her eyes around the room, and at the back she saw a back door leading to a dark alley it seemed, seeing it was night from the small window on the door. Well, it was better than staying here. Maybe the guy was lying through his teeth and kidnapping her; better safe than sorry, "Guess I'll be seeing you around...." Aseles quickly rounded the edge of the bed, heading toward the back door and reaching for the handle.

The man suddenly appeared in front, guarding the back door, "You're not going anywhere." His expressionless voice stopped her cold, and she was once again captured into his eyes, surprised of his quick motion. She was about to protest, until he gripped her shoulder and pushed her side against the wall, sending some pain.

"What are-" she struggled, but continued to stare at those irises, full of depression and darkness....but they shined so purely, as if they were innocent. What he was planning?

He suddenly placed his face right in front and she no longer struggled, having to look at his cold stare, "You're not going anywhere," he repeated.

"What are you doing, Cloud?" A man suddenly from the front door had walked inside the hotel room, and Aseles gave a small sigh of relief when the man named Cloud released her, walking off as if nothing had occurred. Her eyes turned back to the man that had entered, seeing his warm eyes focus with his broad shoulders holding a black jacket with a white, fur collar. Behind his head, his brown hair hung sharply at its ends and his belts clanked against each other around his black pants. His black boots echoed in the room as he walked in, shutting the door behind him.

"We were just talking," Cloud responded expressionless again, leaning against the wall in the same posture as before.

The brunette man that walked in turned his head toward her, "So....you're the other keybearer?"

"Huh?" Aseles looked at him, quite perplexed of the word that rung out of his mouth....

"The name's Leon," the man said. "Yours?" Aseles hesitated, as she briefly looked about the room. "No one is going to hurt you. We found you in the alley, and thought it was best to bring you here for safety. We won't stay along, but you'll have to stick with us for the time being."

"Uh, Aseles..." she replied. He seemed...nice, though...she knew well enough that she was giving out her name to a bunch of strangers.

"First off, do you know what a keybearer is?" Leon asked. Aseles shook her head, puzzled of the question. She had never even heard of the term, or knew something like that even existed. A bearer of a key? Yeah, that was normal.....Oh.....wait.....the key! That key!

Aseles held out her hand, and waited as Leon watched. There was a flash of light in the room, Aseles blinking as she held up the crown of the weapon toward Leon, waving it slightly, "This thing....right?"

He nodded, "A keybearer is also a person who has to get rid of the Heartless in the worlds. But now we have the Organization to deal with," Leon continued, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"Wait...Heartless? What are...Heartless?" Aseles raised a brow.

"You'll see soon enough," Leon promised. Oh no...why did this sound completely dangerous and unsupervised? "And the Organization... Organization XIII, addressed by the King himself." .....WHAT THE HELL WAS GOING ON?! Who in the world-WHAT? Aseles slapped a hand to her face, not intending to make such a scene...but goodness gracious, they were throwing all this information at her all at once. She could feel her brain bulging. Perhaps it was best not to ask too many questions, figuring that she wasn't going to go anywhere on the knowledge of events at this point. And after such a horrific dream....

"You'll see," Cloud hinted, darting his eyes toward Aseles. She stared at him blankly, unsure whether to nod or not. It seemed she was going to have to stick with him, seeing that she really

didn't have any other choice.

"The Heartless cause already too much trouble, now this..." Leon seemed to be speaking to Cloud, but Aseles didn't bother to meet his gaze. She was transfixed with everything that was going on.....it was simply going to quick to understand. What could she understand, if all that she knew was totally knocked out the window?

"We need to go to Hollow Bastion with the others first," Leon ordered toward the man named Cloud. His eyes looked toward Aseles, warm and sincere, "We'll be outside, waiting for you." Leon began to lead the way as Cloud followed moments later, and indeed the door was left ajar.

Aseles stood up a couple of moments herself, but she immediately went toward the back door, and tugged on the handle. It was no use...it was locked. She couldn't escape through the back. This feeling of having to go with strangers, it was.....no, this wasn't happening, she must be dreaming. Aseles readied herself, and slapped herself across the face. She seethed and winced, but the scorching pain in her cheek soon subsided and she opened her eyes once more....still finding herself in that same room. No...she wasn't dreaming.....This.....*was* real.

There was nothing left....and Aseles felt the dreading burden upon her stomach. This was so wrong...but she had no choice but to go with them...and help them with whatever they asked for. They didn't seem like bad people....but they were not the people she wanted to be with. There was nothing left of what had happened....and it was truly sad to point it out. There was no evidence of anything left of hers....she had to go with them....now.

Aseles sighed heavily in defeat, and began to walk out of the room with nothing but the clothes she had on her back, seeing Leon and Cloud were waiting outside in the long hallway of the Hotel. They looked to her, but Aseles said nothing as she began to follow them, the door of the Green Room closing behind. And the end on the left side of the hallway stood double-doors, and Aseles found herself walking out of the building with her eyes hunched, unable to spot the mysterious figure at the opposite end of the hall.

"Keyblade, as well..." the man said under his breath. "Hmmm, very interesting, she doesn't even remember." The man turned his back, making a black portal in front of him. He looked back to where the girl had left, and entered the portal...

## OUTSIDE:

Looking around, Aseles found herself facing a dead district, with some shops on the other side, closed for the night. Along its walkway, it lead to a staircase at the bottom where a huge vacant space of boardwalk lay. To her left was another pathway that led to a large, white building that towered over all the others, looking somewhat like a church. A few alleys led to two different parts of the district, but to her right was where she paid the most attention, seeing Leon and Cloud leading the way to a pair of huge brown, wooden doors. Was it really safe to follow them? Well... they did save Aseles....right?

Taking that as motivation to follow, she did so, and walked behind them several feet. However, before Leon's gloved hand could grip the handle of the wooden door, Aseles sensed a disturbance behind, and quickly turned to the eerie atmosphere around, seeing dark pools begin to appear on the sidewalk that quickly surrounded the three in a half ring. The creatures began to ascend, their beady, yellow eyes gazing and glaring like slits.

"These are H-Heartless?" Aseles narrowed her eyes. Leon and Cloud immediately took out a set of weapons in hand, and charged as Aseles stayed relatively close behind them. However, no, dodging wasn't the right thing. Aseles had to do something....Something was there for her to do.

"Look out!" Leon's voice boomed. Aseles whirled around behind her, and swung her arm as a reflect, and outburst the Keyblade appeared in a remarkable shine. It was very strange to have something such as this in hand, but taking the opportunity, she began to swing in every direction, vigilant of where Leon and Cloud were, forbidding harming any of them with this new weapon. Considering the fact that she had never even fought with a simple bat, or have ever seen a keyblade used in combat, it was beginning to take its toll on her body, weakening her stamina immediately...but the drive to live was raging in her blood.

As if it weren't bad enough, the Keyblade was like a magnet, because the more she defeated, the more pools of Heartless formed. These Heartless were taller, had longer claws, and had longer antennas than the previous ones. Unknowing, one came right below her but she quickly caught its act as she ran from the spot, feeling something flowing along her cheek. She looked over to Leon and Cloud who continued their assaults, but at this rate, the battle would not be won.

Aseles had a jolt of an idea, and struck her keyblade within the ground beneath her. She turned it clockwise, and felt some power surging through the keyblade. She turned it again, and once more, and the ground began to crack and jolt in such bright light. There was a screech in the air, and a few minutes later, the rumbling stopped. Aseles cracked an eye open, and her mouth dropped to see that the numerous of Heartless were defeated, nothing left of their existence in the dark of the night. Cloud and Leon looked over to her as Aseles trembled in place, unable to relax her muscles, her hands gripping the handle of her weapon with so much force.

"We better go before more appear," Leon suggested, and held Aseles by the shoulder. She jumped at his touch, and felt herself being led forward, her keyblade vanishing from sight with Cloud sticking close behind. It was obvious these two knew what they were dealing with...

LATER:

Standing below a bright light post, it felt much better for Aseles than the scenery before, and literally standing in light seemed to have driven the darkness around back into the shadows. However, she seemed oblivious to everything but the presence of the two males, and the tense grip of the keyblade that she endured half an hour before. Its power was so extraordinary....was it such a good idea that she was wielding it?

Leon was still inside that...Accessory Shop getting somethings while Aseles was left uncomfortably with Cloud outside in the First District. They had not spoken a single word, but knowing he was around, she had a chance to fight against those Heartless if they decided to show up. To occupy her time, Aseles had counted the steps of the staircase leading to the Shop, then twice, then on the third time she counted by twos. Her eyes gazed among the night sky and twinkling stars, then along the brick floor and deserted buildings among the area. And the end of the First District was a pair of large, double doors, but she took a guess that would be their exit from this place. But...then where would they go? How far was this...Hollow Bastion that they had mentioned?

"Why did you do that?" Cloud asked suddenly. Holy crap, she forgot he was there....and he was standing only a few feet away.

"Do what?" she straightened her posture. There was no relaxing with this man around.

"With your Keyblade..." Cloud continued.

"Oh...um, I don't...know. It just appeared in my head," Aseles responded truthfully. His eyes seemed to be scanning her face with much intensity, and Aseles could feel the streak of red durable paint across her face. He saw right through her...



"Hhhmm," he responded with a slight scoff. What was this man's deal? Surely....he wanted to know something. There was a set of footsteps and Aseles turned to the left, seeing Leon walking down the steps, heading toward the two. Aseles was relieved of his arrival.

"Alright, let's go. Wait, Aseles, what happened to your face?" Leon asked. Cloud blinked quickly, looking at her. She blinked rapidly, reaching up, and feeling the dried blood on her face. Oh...that's what that was. She seriously thought she was just sweating.

"Heartless...." Aseles managed to say.

Leon reached into his pocket and pulled out a hand-sized bottle of glass, with swirling green liquid within, "Drink it, it will make it better." Aseles raised an eyebrow to him....and questioned whether he thought if she was stupid or not.

"...Drink...that?" Aseles scowled slightly. Leon nodded, and handing her the bottle right in front of her. Oh, whelp, she had no choice now. She looked to Leon once more, but nevertheless she uncorked the bottle and pressed the opening to her lips, letting the liquid slide down her throat. Please don't go unconscious...please no.....

The empty glass gleamed, then disappeared in a set of twinkles. Aseles blinked rapidly and felt herself completely rejuvenated. She reached up, and felt that the wound across her cheek was completely gone, and the blood had vanished. Well...she was glad she didn't faint from drinking weird substances.

"Better?" Leon asked. Aseles nodded gently, and Leon began to lead the way once more toward the double doors at the end. Cloud looked intently at Aseles still, but she was quick to follow right beside Leon, feeling the crease of pink across her face. There was no point in running away, or accusing them of treachery. They really saved her, from whatever trouble she had placed herself in from before...whatever it was. Where else could she go?

Leon opened the doors, and Aseles looked up, in awe as she stared at the multicolored engine that stood on four firm metal stands. It was facing the doors like a missile; it looked pretty much like the rocket a little kid could ever imagine. It was huge indeed, designed with a blue and yellow layout, a huge cockpit on top with huge wings at the sides that were shaped like diamonds.

"We're going to ride a rocket?" Aseles questioned. Was it even safe? She was afraid to ask. "Where to?"

Leon smiled, "It's a Gummi Ship, and to Hollow Bastion." Just then, a staircase descended downward from the bottom of the ship. Okay, that was pretty cool, she had to admit.

"We better hurry," Cloud replied amidst the excitement. Leon led the way as Aseles followed behind the two men again, looking at the small intricate details of this ship. She looked behind to see the staircase rising and closing with a lock, leaving the three inside the huge cockpit with two seats in front and two more rows of two seats behind. Along the front of the seats were several controls, consisting of buttons, levers, and other gizmos that glowed and blinked of several colors. There were also several computer screens at the sides, with a door that was at the back of the cockpit. At the very front was the huge window, and she was able to look at the large, wooden doors clearly from the top of its metal hinges.

"Put on your belt," Cloud ordered. Aseles watched as the two males had taken the first, two seats in front. She looked about and took the seat behind Cloud, knowing full well that if she gave Cloud any view of her....he would not stop staring. She noticed the belts and strapped herself in, tugging at it to make sure it was secure. Cloud looked to Leon, seeming to ask for permission. Leon nodded as Aseles braced herself for the worst, seeing Cloud pull down a lever quickly.

The gummi ship roared to life, shaking and suddenly pushing her body back against the seat, making her body feel like water. The ship rumbled, and in a sudden jolt all was sane again. Aseles hunched forward slightly, groaning slightly to look up only to be amazed at what she saw outside the large window. There were...hundreds of stars, and swirling movements of galaxies. This...no, she had to be dreaming. It was....beautiful. She did not care for the silence that followed for the next hour, attracting her mind to only pay attention to it.

Aseles could only imagine how far this would go, or how far it would take to finally understand what was happening. Refraining from asking questions was difficult, but it was best because....perhaps she did not want to know the answers yet. This was all so sudden, so how could she possibly understand of anything that was happening. As if a warning, her head began to ache, yet she guessed it was probably from the light waves of anticipation. She decided to fall asleep, pressing her arms among one arm of the chair, and resting her heavy head upon them. The feeling of pain was gone for now...

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*Nothing but pitch black...Where?*

*A small light appeared, and she ran toward it. She saw a boy with brown spiky hair. His face was unforgettable...it was the same face she saw on that glass floor.*

*"Hi," the boy stated.*

*Aseles stood before him, trying to catch her breath, "Uh...hey."*

*"So, you wield a Keyblade too?" he asked.*

*"...How in the world did you find that out?" she asked. He held out his hand and there appeared a keyblade, the same as hers.*

*"My name's Sora," he answered.*

*Here we go....giving out names to stranger's again, "Mine's Aseles."*

*"We'll meet each other soon, I promise..." Sora suddenly answered, smiling.*

*"Huh?" The heck was this guy talking about? He wasn't even real, he was just a figment of her mind....right?*

Aseles felt a hard thump and opened her eyes. She had fallen onto the tiled floor, the belt somehow managing to unbuckle. Groaning, she sat up.

"Sorry about that." She looked up, seeing Leon by her side and helping her up. Aseles rubbed her head, feeling his hand release her arm as she looked around, making sure she was actually still on the gummi ship. Shortly after, Aseles was led down the staircase, finding herself in an open view of a ruined castle in the distance, with the skies shining blue with a few clouds running along the sky. The castle's metal surface was torn down to pieces, with the iron walls creaking and hanging in abandonment. It was the only thing she could look at, her eyes focused on it intently. Something familiar...churned at the pit of her stomach just from the sight of it, but she could not put her finger on it.

"Let's go," Leon requested as Cloud and Aseles followed behind, her gaze cut off from the castle. As she walked down a few steps of stone, she looked to the left to see a hoard of shops with an open area that led right to it. Not many people were out, but a few to show that there was indeed

people here. Other than shops, to her right was a huge stone wall blocking the castle from view. A small fountain had been formed against the wall below the platform she was now walking up on, leading past the shops toward the top of several staircases leading down to the houses below. Leon continued walking and Aseles was right behind him, but at the corner of her eye she saw Cloud stop beside a huge freezer at the left wall. She was about to question why he stopped, but thought better of it and continued to follow Leon on her own.

Down the two flights of stairs, Aseles approached the entrance of a maze of the condos, high in stature. The two went around several corners, with Aseles almost losing Leon several times until she was now several yards behind him. The whole place seemed deserted, and she questioned how many people actually lived here. Turned to the right, Leon slipped inside a green door at the end, expecting Aseles to be right behind him she guessed. She hurried forward into a small run, walking up the small steps of the platform, but....something was around. Something was watching her...

Aseles swiftly turned around, witnessing a person now standing at the far end, a person in a black cloak.

"Uh, who are you?" Aseles asked with a raised eyebrow. Great....just great. Random strangers today. It was their day to shine.

The person didn't answer but took a step forward. He suddenly raised the arms by his sides, and she backed up, blinking uncontrollably to see his palms flash to suddenly draw out two keyblades, baffling her on the spot. The heck, who was handing out these stinkin weapon anyways?! Clearly, this stranger was meaning to pick a fight. She swung her arm, flashing out her own weapon before him. He didn't seem surprised, and charged forward.

She went quickly on the defensive, holding her arms in front of her with the keyblade outstretched in both palms. He swung with much agility, both of his weapons clashing against her only shield. Her arms shook, unable to comprehend this power he held. In a desperate attempt to intimidate him, she slashed her keyblade upward, sending one of his keyblades up and pinned the second against the ground with her own. She swung across, but in an instant, she attacked nothing but the air. What?! How did he-

"WHO ARE YOU?!?" she whispered angrily.

Nothing was heard, but the tap of something high up. She swiftly looked up, seeing the figure was now standing on the rooftop behind her, where Leon had headed inside. How the heck was Leon not able to hear any of this?! Surely...he would've come out-

The figure stared straight at her, she could feel it as he suddenly began to maneuver all among the rooftops, and in a matter of a second, there were too many figures to count. She grimaced at his taunting challenge, knowing full well that he was clearly not human. What was hiding under that dark hood of his? Seriously, he was jumping like a freaking monkey for crying out loud! He zipped around from place to place, making her head turn, her eyes darting back and forth. In a swift move, he was now on the pavement, his back facing the wall. Aseles took no hesitation to dash and swing, but again, she was met with the air.

"Huh?" she slid to a stop. She quickly turned, seeing he was now facing her. She froze, the keyblade tight in her grip, but unable to fend him off if he struck. Who....was this? What the heck was he? He moved so fast, oh crap, he was getting closer. OH CRAP. NO. CRAP.

"My name is Roxas," he whispered, yet his presence was all it took to make her go weak to the knees. Not of fondness, but of weakness itself. His strength, his durability, it was far superior. She was literally at his mercy. He gripped his keyblades, and pointed them threateningly, "You know

anyone named Sora?" he asked. Okay, not...good luck. Wait...Sora.....OH CRAP, he was real?! Unless this guy...had the ability to read minds...dreams....

"Do you?" the male persisted gently. Aseles shook her head hurriedly. He lowered his keyblades, flashing them out of sight, and he begun to walk away. He lifted a black gloved hand, creating a black portal a few feet away.

"Why?" she asked. Not the smartest thing, but-

".....I want to meet him," Roxas abruptly answered, disappearing within the portal. The portal lifted and disappeared in a wisp of air, signaling the figure was gone. Aseles sighed, finally feeling the relaxation of her screaming muscles. She immediately called her keyblade off and began to hurry to the green door where Leon had disappeared into. Was lying to him a good idea to begin with?

Aseles quickly stopped and looked behind again, expecting to catch the figure, but what she met was a group far out of her reach of imagination. It was a trio consisting of a teen boy, a duck, and a dog...that both stood on two feet? .....Why was this getting so weird all of a sudden? No more surprises....

"Hey," the boy called first, his bright blue eyes catching her own. His attire consisted of a black swimsuit, complimented with identical shoes with yellow cupping around his ankles, and two straps were locked across each shoe. He also wore a small ebony jacket that was shouldered with metal, a crown brilliant necklace around his neck- OH dear god....was this.....it couldn't be. That same necklace. WHY? But..those eyes! WAIT...THIS WAS SORA!

"Sora!" Aseles quickly interjected. The teen's eyes widened a degree, his head tilting. OH crap, wrong move....

"How do you know my name?" he asked, raising his eyebrows. The duck with the blue hat and jacket and the dog with the green shirt and black zippered vest tilted their heads toward her in unison.

"We...don't know her...right?" the dog questioned, stroking his chin.

"No....I don't think so," the duck tapped his foot.

"Holy crap, you can talk!?" Aseles shot out, slapping a hand to her mouth.

"Of course I can!" the duck spat back, turning red in the face. The dog seemed to be snickering under his breath, but the teen continued to stare at Aseles with narrowed eyes.

"You're....Aseles," Sora replied, blinking once.

"Now how did you know her name?" the duck shot his eyes to him. "We don't know her!"

Sora shook his hand to him dismissively, but before he could say another word, he cleared his throat, and seemed to have shaken the thought out, "It's nice to meet you." Really...he was just going to ignore this madness of knowing each other's names?

"Well hiya Aseles, the name is Goofy, and here's Donald," the dog replied warmly, signaling to the duck's direction last.

"He has a name too?!" Aseles gasped.

The duck named Donald began to turn so red that Aseles had to literally stop herself from bursting

out, "Oh.....I'm sorry!" She waved her arms frantically in front of her. Donald just started mumbling, tapping his yellow, webbed foot and crossing his feathered arms on his chest.

"Well, we better get going, see if we can find Leon and the others," Sora said, turning to look at Donald and Goofy.

"Leon? He's in there," Aseles pointed toward the door behind.

"How do you know Leon?" Goofy asked.

"Uh...long story," Aseles answered.

"Alright, thanks," Sora smiled, and began to walk forward with Goofy and Donald walking alongside him...with Donald hitting Aseles with one last stare. However, she wasn't paying much attention to his tantrum as she continued to stare at Sora, and for a brief second, the two met eye contact again. Swiftly as it had come, Sora, Donald and Goofy had entered the green door, and left it slightly ajar for her to enter. She rubbed the side of her cheek, unsure what the heck she had just gotten herself into.

## A New Adventure

Mustering all the energy Aseles could bring herself to have, she entered the slightly ajar door, but found that the trio from before and him were not the only ones that had settled themselves within the Study room.

Walking within the warm atmosphere of the room, the first person to catch Aseles' attention was a woman with black, pixie hair and violet eyes. Her attire consisted of almost all black, including her shirt, short-sleeved jacket, headband, and high knee socks. Her feet wore high-top shoes, laced all the way to the very top to the bottom of her knee, colored in camouflage green, the same color for her shorts that reached mid-thigh.

Next ahead in Aseles' view was a man sitting in a rolling chair, wearing a white shirt and blue sweatpants. He had a pair of goggles resting on his bright, blond hair, his eyes focused in Aseles' entry. Now walking into straight view of Aseles was another woman, who was draped with towering, brown bangs on the sides of her temples with a few strands running down the sides of her neck. The rest of her long hair was tied up in a red knot, and she focused her attention toward the approaching trio from moments before. Her pink dress swayed along the bottom of her knees, her jade eyes sparkling at the sight of them.

"It's you!" she greeted.

"Well, look who it is!" the woman with pixie hair exclaimed brightly. By her stance, she seemed very...free spirited, her hands planting themselves immediately on her hips.

"Yuffie!" Sora, Donald and Goofy greeted.

"Haven't seen you in a long time. The thing is, we forgot about you guys, but then we got our memories back at the same time!" Yuffie explained. O-kay...

"You forgot about us?" Sora asked desolately.

"Cheer up, at least you're here! Well, who's your friend?" Yuffie asked, looking at Aseles with her head sideways, almost the same as Sora did moments before. Aseles felt her cheeks flush, and Leon was quick to clear his throat.

"This is Aseles, the one I told you all about," Leon replied smoothly, leaning against the wall. He told them all about you???

"OH! So *this* is Aseles!" Yuffie hurried over, immediately making Aseles back up a step, but the woman was unaware of invading her space. She circled around Aseles, holding her chin with a hand. Aseles felt the smear of red across her face yet again. "It's nice to meet you! I'm Yuffie, this is Aerith (she pointed to the second woman), Cid (she pointed to the man that was sitting in front of the computer in the chair), and this is Merlin!" She thumbed behind.

Aseles looked past the trio that stood at the side to see a man of old age sitting in a cushioned, large chair, sitting on a small platform at the center of the study. Several books lay at his feet and on the small table with the rest of the man's teacups, but they did not hide the stacks of books in the numerous shelves at the end of the room. His blue robes rested largely on him with a white beard resting on his lap, drooping over and almost touching the tips of his perking feet. His small bifocals rested at the bridge of his nose and full cheeks, but it was no mistake that he greeted Aseles was a warm presence and smile.

“You already met Leon, and Cloud who is...not here, but yeah!” Yuffie clapped her hands once. “Welcome to the Hollow Bastion Committee!”

“Um...thanks,” Aseles shifted uncomfortably in place.

“And you guys too!” Yuffie shot her arms up toward Sora, Donald and Goofy who only exchanged confused looks.

“Committee? Oh!” Sora held out his hand to retrieve what Yuffie was handing him. It was a card, and seemed to have that castle stamped onto it, the castle in the distance. That castle again....

“Thank you so much,” Goofy smiled warmly.

“Don’t thank us just yet,” the one named Cid suddenly pounded his fist into his free hand. Sora, Donald and Goofy automatically backed up, but Aseles kept her place. She was already the nearest one to the door. “We got problems here...” Cid huffed.

“Oh, no worries, we got it covered,” Sora sighed slightly, looking up to Cid firmly.

“We would be hoping you would. Thank you,” Aerith smiled fondly.

““No problem!” Donald said. What the heck was going on?? Was it the Heartless? Or this... Organization Leon mentioned earlier? ....Or...no, probably both. Both.

"Let's go. I need to show you something at the Bailey," Leon said, walking toward the door.

“Wait just a moment, Sora,” Merlin interjected. Aseles looked toward the wizard that had stood from the chair, setting his cup of tea down on the clothed table. He walked down from the platform as the trio began to walk to his direction.

“Aseles, come on,” Leon gestured to her. Aseles looked to him, but followed him as the two walked out of the green door. This time Aseles was sure to keep a close pace next to Leon as the two began to round a few houses, and began to head up a flight of stairs that led toward an open doorway at the end of the stone platform. The sky above shot its hard rays of sun onto the pavement, and the instant shade within the place called the Bailey was incredibly soothing to Aseles’s skin. There were a few balconies at their left, and another flight of stairs leading down to their right, but it seemed Leon wanted to wait in the center specifically.

“Hey...Leon?” Aseles asked. “What’s with Cloud?”

“Hmm? Why do you ask?” Leon leaned against the stone wall, keeping his eyes on her.

“Well....looks like something is up with him but....I hardly know him anyways....” Aseles shrugged.

“Hmm...perhaps you should ask him then...” Leon suggested.

“Ask him? What’s bothering him?” she raised a brow. They had nothing to share...and Leon wanted her to ask him a question....really....

“Yeah..” Leon said. “Or you can wait for him to tell you. He’s not the one to approach people though....” Aseles wanted to roll her eyes, but decided against the action. There was the sound of running footsteps, and Aseles turned to see it was Sora, Donald and Goofy approaching the entrance of the Bailey. The sun immediately shined away from them as they entered the shade, their chests slightly heaving from the run.

"Well, took you long enough," Leon stated.

"Sorry," Sora exhaled, "Merlin needed something."

"What did you want to show us?" Donald asked.

Leon's face turned grim, and he stood from the wall and directed his attention toward the open area from the balcony, "Look over there..." Sora blinked, but walked toward the balcony with Donald and Goofy. Curious, Aseles followed, standing on Goofy's other side, and looked below toward the open gap. Her mouth dropped to the ground, below a march of horrendous creatures, vast in numbers as they literally made the floor look like the blackest sea there ever was, full of poison. Sora's eyes narrowed to them as Donald and Goofy pretty much shared the same reaction as Aseles did.

"We have a problem with the heartless, still..." Leon pointed toward the darker looking creatures, and Aseles noticed they were the only ones that had glowing yellow eyes. Heartless....

"And, with those things," Leon next pointed toward the creatures that glistened silver and white, their bodies wiggling in weird patterns in the air and on the ground.

"Nobodies," Sora gritted his teeth..

"You do know what we're dealing with," Leon sounded relieved.

"What are Nobodies?" Aseles looked up toward Leon.

Sora looked toward her, catching her attention, "Nobodies are created when a person turns into a Heartless, and leave a vessel behind."

"Wait...how do you turn into a Heartless?"

"Well..." Sora rubbed the back of his head, "You-"

"We've got company," Leon suddenly turned. The rest of you followed suite, catching the white wisps forming in the air. Leon rushed forward, striking the enemies with his gunblade, shooting a large fire spell of some sort toward the group, causing a fast rush of ash to sweep across the area. Leon swung his blade forward twice, and stood in front of the exit that led toward the town. The Nobodies dashed toward his direction, but Sora, Donald and Goofy were quick to begin to eliminate the rest.

In the aspect of all the fighting, Aseles's eyes caught the bright glow of something forming in Sora's hand, and it was there she caught the weapon he was swinging powerfully among the foes surrounding them. It was the same one she had seen in her dream, it was indeed Sora's keyblade, majestic and silver with gold on the handle.

Aseles shook her head quickly, and dashed forward in haste to assist Leon any way she could. She swung with both hands gripping the handle, swinging savagely around, hoping to get a hit. Leon swung in front of her, his blade smacking several Nobodies to the ground in front of her feet. Did this man not see where she was???

As the fighting progressed, Aseles noticed that she was indeed the less experienced among the group, with Leon agile with his attacks and the trio simply charging with no hesitation. With little experience she had, Aseles continued to swing and attack, preventing from any of the white dancers and samurai Nobodies to enter the town.

Finally the last Nobody was struck down with Leon delivering its sentence with a loud slam. He



straightened up, flicking his wrist to unarm his blade. Aseles stood firmly up, but the drumming in her arms was clearly a sign of the pain that would soon emerge. Indeed, it was difficult to hold the keyblade in the first place...but something of the swings set her on edge, on something that could be improved on. Leon began to quickly head toward the descending staircase at the far end, and Aseles followed, while struggling to call off her weapon, unsure how to really. She rubbed her right arm, but then she felt herself bump into Leon's back, and she groaned.

"What'd you stop for?" she questioned, looking up to him. He was transfixed to look forward, and she followed. Along the towering wall in front stood mysterious figures...all in black cloaks, much like the one that you had encountered a while ago. These figures seemed to be taller, much like Leon's height. What was going on?

"Organization XIII!" Sora shouted, ready to pounce with his legs spread apart and hands in fists. Donald and Goofy stood behind him, looking upon the figures as well. This was Organization XIII. But...what about-

"Well, if it isn't Roxas," the person in the main front stated coolly.

Sora raised an eyebrow, then turned toward Donald, "Did he just call me Roxas?"

"Roxas," Aseles repeated behind Leon, gripping onto her abdomen in a tight clamp. An uneasy feeling took place. Was Roxas part of this Organization? He had worn a black cloak when she encountered him a few moments ago....Why call Sora...Roxas?

Aseles looked back up, and began to search under their hidden faces. Suddenly, she spotted one looking at the same direction as her, his eyes glowing in the darkness of his hood. He came down as the group held their ground, Aseles making sure that she was standing between Leon and Sora.

"You know him?" the figure suddenly asked, standing a good distance away. Weapons were quickly drawn out again. "Harsh," he replied. Aseles averted her attention back up. The rest of them had disappeared.

"Harsh? Looks like your friends left you," Sora said, narrowing his eyes.

"Now, you wouldn't hurt an old man would you?" he said openly.

"You gonna cry?" Sora gritted his teeth.

"Nah," he said. He then turned his attention toward Aseles again, "Anyways, you know Roxas?" The heck?! Did he actually hear her say his name? Or did the recognition of Roxas's name show on her face?

Aseles said nothing at first, but when the eyes began to avert in her direction, she knew it was best to say something, "Never heard of the name."

"Hey, who not both you and Roxas join us for an event???" he said, gesturing his hand to Sora.

"It's Sora!" Sora retorted.

"And no!!" Aseles answered back. Whatever it was that this man was implying, it didn't sound too pleasant. With no hesitation, Aseles took a step forward, holding her keyblade tightly.

"Harsh," the guy said again. Then he made a black portal, and headed into it with backward steps.

"Hey, come back here!" Sora and Donald charged, but they were too late. He was gone.

"He got away-" Donald stopped. Aseles leveled her posture, and saw that the trio was now staring right at her...and at the keyblade in her hand. Aseles took a step back from alarm, and found the keyblade was out of possession, twinkling in small, radiant lights. It did not make the spotlight any better, unfortunately.

"Why is-" Sora looked over at Leon, then back at Aseles who was now standing defensively behind him.

"To be honest..." Leon crossed his arms, "We're wondering ourselves."

"How do you have the keyblade too, Aseles?" Goofy approached. He remembered her name...it was a relief. Though she bit her tongue, swallowing. After a few seconds of thought, she shook her head and shrugged. She honestly had no idea how to answer him.

"Well, looks like you guys are going to be going through another adventure," Leon crossed his arms. Sora, Donald, and Goofy snapped out of their trances, and nodded toward Leon. Sora took out his Committee card and held it up for all to see.

"The Hollow Bastion Committee Card," Goofy smiled.

Abruptly, the card floated out of Sora's hand, shining brightly as it did. It beamed toward the ground as the group backed fairly away from it, then seeing a huge keyhole glowing at up near the roof of the Bailey, touched by the light from the floor. Looking to the side, Aseles heard a rattling, and saw Sora's keyblade had begun to shake, redirecting its path toward it. She raised her eyebrows, her eyes wide at the event. It shook more as she blinked, her eyes crying and seeing a white beam shoot out from his keyblade's tip, heading to the huge keyhole. It shined brightly, and then there was the sound of something locking.

"Sorry Leon, but we gotta get going," Sora answered. He seemed familiar with the occurrence.

"Right. Make sure you take care of yourselves," Leon nodded as the group began to head back inside the Bailey again. "And be sure to come back anytime you'd like to recover."

Aseles merely stood by Leon's side, waving at them slightly as the three stood opposite of you, "Bye." For some odd reason, it left her disappointed to see them go, a feeling that was unfamiliar to her. She had just barely met them, and now they were leaving; something told her...she would be missing them. What was this connection that compelled her to them? She didn't know half of what was going on, and found it unfair. But nevertheless, she would stay with Leon, and perhaps uncover what had happened moments before Leon had found her with Cloud.

"Hey, Aseles, you want to come?" Goofy suddenly asked, making Sora and Donald stop in their tracks. They turned as Goofy stood in front of her, smiling politely. She blinked in surprise, searching his eyes for some deviance.

"W-What? Uh...why..." she swallowed, stuttering.

"Yeah, it would be loads of fun," Sora approached next, grinning. Donald stood on Goofy's other side, looking at the two in confusion. He didn't seem too flattered with the idea.

"Uh..." Aseles looked at Leon, confused on what to say.

"Go with them, they'll need you soon enough," Leon suggested with a smile. Wait....WHAT? He was letting her go just like that? SURELY he had his doubts-

"Really...? Thanks!" Aseles immediately grinned at Leon and turned toward Sora, Donald, and Goofy. "Are you sure? I mean...we don't know each other very well..." That much was true, but

leaving here....would be something of an adventure.

"We'll do that on the way, c'mon," Sora smirked with a nod. Goofy smiled again, patting her shoulder as her stomach flipped at their acceptance, well, almost their entire acceptance. Donald merely began to walk forward as Sora, Goofy and Aseles followed, waving goodbye to Leon as they began to head out of the Bailey and down the staircase from before.

"Well, uh, where are we going?" Aseles asked along the way, passing through the maze of houses. Sora walked next to her, leaving Donald and Goofy in front.

"We're going to another world," Sora answered.

"Can you really do that?" Aseles asked. Well, she did leave that Traverse Town, but how many worlds could there be to visit?

"Yup, and we've been going to many different ones," Sora placed his hands behind his head.

"Because you guys were in a first adventure right?" Aseles recalled Leon about mentioning the first.

"Yeah..." Sora said his smile fading.

"Huh? D-Did I say something wrong???"

Sora's head hunched a bit, "Because, I'm still looking for my friends. I lived on an island, but I was separated from them," Sora explained.

"Oh....I know how you feel...uh, sort of."

"You do?" Sora said, finally lifting his head.

"Well, yeah. I got separated from...yeah," she replied. Sora tilted his head yet again, but the attention was averted toward the approaching Market Place. Donald and Goofy had rounded behind the brick wall at the end, where a fairly small gummi ship waited over the brick wall near the bottom of a ravine. Sora hoisted himself over, waiting for Aseles as she did the same, and the two began to head down, reaching the bottom in a small jump.

Sora cleared his throat, "So, ready to go, Aseles? Ever been in a gummi ship?"

"Yeah, in Leon's," Aseles nodded as she began to follow Sora, the two walking up the metal staircase and into the cockpit. Inside, it wasn't much like Leon's ship, but it was indeed intriguing because of its total different design of controls. A whole row of buttons and levers rested below of the huge glass window, four seats rested right behind them. Aseles quickly chose the one closet to the edge and sat down, looking past the round, glass view in front.

Sora, Donald, and Goofy occupied the seats in order from the other far side, Donald taking the wheel of the gummi ship. Aseles felt the ship immediately rising upward, and braced herself. Quickly, she felt the rush of blood, and then looked out to see a huge sky of stars.

She couldn't believe it. She was actually heading out to other worlds.

With the emotions and shocks running through her, she couldn't help but feel the flow of slumber hit her instantly. She didn't want to...but gave into the large weight of her eyelids, only able to think about the adventure that waited.

LATER:

"Rise and shine, Aseles!" a voice called out.

"What?" Aseles grumbled and forced her head to lift up. She opened her eyes to see it was a grinning Goofy, leaning down to look at her. "Where are we?" she sat up and stretched, rubbing her drooping eyes.

"We're approaching the world," he responded.

"We're here," Sora said somewhere nearby, and Aseles felt the heart of the ship rumble, the whole floor quaking. She held onto her seat as Goofy fell back, rubbing his head as he sat back up. She smiled and stood, unstrapping the belt and lending a hand to Goofy, helping him up. Nearby, the staircase of the rocket thudded, then began to descend downward toward the floor below, touching the unknown territory below.

As she followed behind the trio to the dirt floor below, Aseles looked back to observe the staircase rise into the gummi ship. The rocket suddenly came to life, hovered off the ground for a moment, then tilted and shot upward into the sky, disappearing with a small twinkle.

"Uh...is it gonna come back?" Aseles blinked, thumbing at the disappearing ship.

"Yeah, later when we need to leave," Sora nodded from up ahead. Okay, how the heck did a ship know when to come back exactly? Maybe...earlier Sora's keyblade had shined, and he stated they had to go....did that keyblade of his call that ship to retrieve them?

Shaking the thought out, Aseles looked around the area, seeing nothing but bamboo trees and bushes covering her every glance around, along with a clear blue sky above. The dirt floor seemed untouched here, and the areas seem abandoned.

"Hey what's that?" Donald whispered. Sora, Goofy and Aseles turned around, seeing Donald beginning to stray away, and pointing to something up ahead. Aseles quickly followed, witnessing what Donald was referring to.

There, a few yards away, a huge shadow on a rock wall was hissing and speaking quite rapidly, its grotesque reflection of itself hiding right behind it. It looked like some kind of dragon, with sharp fangs and talons on its edged hands. In front of the rock sat a woman, dressed in a green warrior suit with a sword strapped on her right hip. She had pulled up her straight black hair in a bun behind her, her black eyes viewing at the creature talking before her.

"Let's jump on him on 3!" Sora whispered, giving a thumbs-up to the three of them. Wait, what? He didn't know what he was up against and he was already planning to take it down? The young woman didn't even look terrified by this whole thing really.

"Got it!" Donald agreed. They both started to tiptoe behind the bushes, eyeing the shadow on the rock wall.

"Hey fellas... I don't think she's in da-" Goofy started.

"1..." Sora and Donald counted.

"You guys, Goofy might be r-," Aseles began.

"2..."

"No dont j-!" Goofy and Aseles yelled out.

"3!" Sora and Donald shouted, leaping out of their hiding.

The mysterious shadow quickly turned its head toward the yell, spotting Sora and Donald in midair. It ran quickly out of view, and all Aseles could see was something she had never thought was actually possible. It was so puny, and looked like a dragon, well a tiny dragon, a lizard... something. Sora and Donald landed face first on the dirt floor, Goofy snickering quietly while Aseles merely slapped a hand to her face again of the whole event.

"Sorry to scare you like that," Aseles stepped forward, unsure if she should've or not as she headed toward the surprised woman who stared dumbfounded at the fallen Donald and Sora. The tiny dragon had taken refuge at the collar of her suit.

"You-" she started, but she quickly turned her voice manly. "You didn't scare me." O-kay...

"Hey, it's Mushu!" Goofy exclaimed. Sora and Donald stood up, wiping the dust off their faces and clothes.

"Mushu?" Sora asked, eyeing the little dragon and leaning forward.

"Well if it isn't Sora, Donald, and Goofy!" the dragon exclaimed excitedly, quick to perch himself out of hiding.

"You know them?" the woman asked her tiny friend, turning her eyes to him.

"Sure, I was traveling with them kicking monster butt! It looks like you have a friend traveling with you this time," Mushu replied. He jumped off of the woman's shoulder, landing in front of Aseles.

She bent down on her knees, "Hi, I'm Aseles." She took out her hand, taking in his offered puny one and shook once.

"Nice to meet you," Mushu replied.

"Who's the person with you?" Sora asked next, pointing to the woman.

"This is Mu- I mean Ping!"

"Hey Ping!" Goofy waved.

"Ping, what's Mushu supposed to be?" Aseles asked her... or him.

"Mushu's my guardian," Ping replied and nodded.

"Hey....You lied to us!" Donald quacked, pointing at Mushu.

"Well..." Mushu started, "will you help me with Mu-....I mean Ping here! I'm trying to get *him* into the army."

"Yeah, I might be able to fit in with guys like you," Ping answered.

"What do you mean *fit* in?" Sora asked suspiciously while Donald looked at her with narrowed eyes.

"Am I the only one that sees the obvious?" Mushu asked.

"Nope," Goofy and Aseles shook their heads.

"What do you mean?" Donald scratched his head.

Aseles sighed, "She's a girl." Sora's and Donald's mouths dropped. Not the brightest group there was, she had to admit.

"YOU'RE A...GIRL!?!!" Sora's mouth dropped. Ping nodded, and couldn't help but laugh. Hey, if guys were clueless like this in the army, then she was sure to make it.

"Well, let's get going," Goofy suggested.

"Man, I can't believe you couldn't see she was a girl. You guys are morons..." Mushu shook his head as he led the way out of the bamboo thicket.

"Hey! We're right here!" Sora yelled with Donald fuming right beside him.

MOMENTS LATER:

"So...Mulan why do you want to join the Army?" Aseles asked while Sora, Donald and Goofy walked beside Mushu up front. The Army Campsite wasn't too far (Aseles hoped), but it would be nice if Aseles was informed of what Mulan was going through at least. She seemed as lost as she was on what she was doing.

"Well, my father was told to join in the Army to fight the Huns, but he couldn't possibly. He would be injured gravely, or worse...So I ran away from home to take his place. I just hope I don't mess up," she said nervously, playing with her gloved fingers.

"Oh, I'm sure you won't," Aseles smiled. "If it's for your dad..."

"You might want to disguise yourself as well...there's a penalty if a woman is found on the army site," Mulan's eyes widened.

"Uh...penalty?" Aseles blinked. "What pen-"

"There it is!" Goofy exclaimed, pointing forward. The group all looked up, and saw the campsite in sight indeed. Penalty if found out someone was a woman....great.

As the group began to make their arrival through the wooden arc of an entrance, Aseles began to bag her shirt from in front, making sure to conceal the small lumps of breasts she had. Next she looked about the hundreds of set up camps and tents, all rattling with commotion. Aseles looked forward, seeing a piece of cloth placed on top of a tent. As the group began to pass it, Aseles quickly snatched it as Mulan watched her carefully, seeing that she cut off a section of it and made a wristband. Aseles wrangled up her hair tightly on her head just like Ping's.

With a secure knot, Aseles looked to Ping for reassurance, and she nodded, "That will do." The group began to approach the line for registration, all of the men talking amongst themselves. Oh great....let the game of being discovered begin.

Suddenly, a staggering Goofy almost fell on Aseles, and she caught him, seeing that Sora was pushed by a small man in a red warrior suit from in front, his bad look actually filling his bad manners. Beside him was a skinny man in a yellow warrior and another man that was wide in size that had a blue warrior suit. This wasn't going to be good.

"Hey, no cutting!" Sora yelled. Here we go....

"Who made you in charge?!" the short man said.

"Well, who made YOU in charge?!" Donald yelled back.

"Back off!" he yelled back. Donald approached and wailed the guy with a smack, making him fall back.

"Hey!" the skinny man quickly approached, pushing Donald.

Goofy then walked forward, wagging his finger at the man, "That's not very nice!"

"Ha! Who says I'm going to listen to you?" the yellow-suited man laughed. Aseles approached next, narrowing her eyes, and pushed him on his shoulder, sending him tumbling back and falling to the ground. The one with red suddenly lunged, pushing Aseles forward and making her fall to the ground on her side. Sora turned to look at the man with a glower, and pushed him.

In the meantime, Goofy helped Aseles up but was then was lifted off the ground with Donald by the huge man, his pudgy hands holding them by the scruffs of their shirts. The whole group rapidly got into frenzy, defending each other, except Mulan. Mulan stared in shock and bewilderment while Aseles pulled the short man's hair, Donald protecting her from the skinny man by kicking him on the legs as Sora hugged Aseles from behind, the both of them pulling harder. The big guy was trying to reach Sora while Goofy was on his bald head, covering the man's eyes.

"Please...stop!" Mulan pleaded. Everyone stopped, shocked.

"Please?" the short one said, "what are you, a sissy too?!?"

"Hey!" Aseles began to haul once more, and the chaos commenced.

"It's the army leader!" a man suddenly shouted out from in front. The whole group stopped, and scrambled, forming the line from behind again. Aseles leaned her head to the side, seeing a man with a black warrior suit over it. He had a ponytail as well and a small, red cape tied around his neck with a sword strapped to his side.

"New warriors?" the man suddenly questioned, stopping in front Sora.

"Yup! Nice to meet ya," Sora nodded.

"Captain Shang," the man nodded toward him, walking down the line. Suddenly he stopped in front of Aseles, his eyes narrowing a bit at her appearance.

"Aren't you a little young to be in the army?" Shang questioned.

"I'm, uh.." Aseles answered in the lowest voice she could form.

"He's with us!" Sora quickly interjected, and wrapped an arm around her shoulder. Shang looked to him, back to her, humming questionably. A few seconds later, Shang began to continue down the row, and then headed back to the front.

"That was close," Mulan whispered in relief.

LATER:

In order for Captain Shang to accept your registration, it was essential to prove strength and participation in numerous tasks that were given out, most having to deal with the invading Heartless of the world, and defeating them to clear areas. Observing them, Aseles noticed they varied, and came to the conclusion that there were many different kinds of Heartless, depending on the site or region. Was it like that for every world then?

However, that wasn't the case; Captain Shang wasn't impressed by Ping yet.

"Don't worry sir, we'll help him," Sora replied. The group was back at the campsite, forming an arc around Shang. He crossed his arms, looking over at Sora, then at Ping, er, Mulan.

"Just give us another task," she requested.

"Hmm... fine. I want you to make it through the mountains and up to the other campsite to clear the road for my men," Shang said ultimately.

"Yes sir!" The group saluted, quickly shown their destination and beginning to head in that direction.

#### MUCH LATER, IN THE MOUNTAINS:

Mulan was getting nervous by the second as the five of them finally approached through the crevice of the boulders. The area was thin and dry, with dust filling the air, and certain trails creating a maze within the mountain pathway.

"Don't worry you'll do fine," Aseles reassured, patting Mulan on her shoulder. She nodded, but she seemed slightly unconvinced of the words.

Suddenly, as Sora stepped forward, Heartless immediately appeared from the forming black orbs in the air. The whole group stood ready with Mushu tucking back inside Mulan's armor for protection, and group rushed forward as the Heartless charged. Aseles swung, quickly turning to see a Heartless rapidly heading toward her with outstretched claws. Mulan struck forward and groaned, swinging her sword powerfully with a heavy blow. The Heartless fell from the air onto the ground and remained in black dust.

"Thanks," Aseles smiled to her.

"No problem!" she replied. The five of them continued toward the top of the mountain, striking and fighting Heartless along the way. Finally, what seemed the end was blocked by a couple of boulders where two huge Heartless stood, ready to guard. The top of their waists formed the body of a man and a horse body for the bottom. Their fierce eyes taunted and their black hands held elongated spears, one for each. Mulan looked at the four for reassurance, and they nodded in agreement (with Mushu looking above from inside her armor, giving a thumbs up).

Mulan, Goofy and Aseles started attacking one while Sora and Donald attacked the other. Aseles struck along with Mulan as Goofy blocked the coming spear attacks, the Heartless quickly left open and pushed forward, thrown off the cliff's side at the left. Aseles turned toward Sora and Donald, unexpectedly seeing Donald's eyes rolling in their sockets, Sora bending down on one knee.

The Heartless charged forward toward him, ready to swing its spear downward and finish him off. Aseles raced forward and jumped, tossing her keyblade unexpectedly forward and catching the Heartless right on the side of the head. It grunted in fury as it stomped its foot toward her direction, and was now charging to her. Aseles's eyes widened, and found a slash cut across her abdomen, burning at her skin. Aseles gasped on how fast the pain had circulated among her body, and she fell to the ground on her side. Her eyes shot up in fear to the Heartless, but the Heartless jumped out of the oncoming keyblade of Sora's. However, Sora was quick to slash upward, cutting the Heartless right dead center, and making it turn to immediate ash. Sora quickly headed over to Aseles's side as the others followed, Donald still trying to recover from the dizzy spell.

"Are you alright?" Sora asked worriedly.

"Yeah Im- UGH...no...no," Aseles sat on her knees, clutching at her abdomen. She tried to stand up, but shook her head, inhaling hurtfully.



Sora's reached into a red pouch on his pants, and handed the green bottle of liquid toward Aseles, "You need this more than I do."

"Uh...thanks," Aseles gently gripped the bottle as Sora uncorked it. Aseles began to drink slowly, afraid to choke on it and spray it in his face. Instantly, the wound healed as the blood dispersed, along with the bottle disappearing from view.

"Better?" Goofy asked.

"Yeah, a lot better," Aseles nodded quickly, and stood up, shaking off the soreness.

"C'mon, I'm guessing we're almost there," Sora stood up as he and Goofy began to help Donald up, beginning to drag him up the mountain with Mulan and Aseles following right behind. At last the group reached the mountain top. It was time to clear this area, and get back to Captain Shang.

#### AFTER MAKING CAMP:

The top of the mountain had been covered in complete snow, with footsteps padding here and there. New tents and buildings were constructed, and were finished in the matter of hours with Aseles's hands becoming numb of the labor. A fire had been created nearby, and she warmed up with the others. It was time to check in with Captain Shang, who stood a few yards away. The group headed toward him, and explained how well the mission went, with Ping's outstanding participation.

"You did make it to the top in one piece, so welcome to the army. However," Captain Shang replied, looking at Ping quickly. He then began to walk away. Jerk.

The group's smiles dropped, looking at Mulan who didn't look as happy as she should. Going through all this mess to impress the Captain wasn't going as well as it was planned. Mushu, on the other hand, all of a sudden came out of a bundle of hay, standing before the group after making sure the coast was clear. Wondering where he was all this time, the group began to head to an isolated area near the exit of camp, as if heading up the rest of the slope.

Mushu began to talk abruptly, excited about something indeed, "Hey, cheer up guys! I've got some great news. Looks like Shan-Yu, the Hun leader, is found spotted in a cave just outside the mountains!" There was a numerous amount of exchanged looks, realizing that he was talking about the MAIN enemy of the army.

"And why is that great news?" Goofy asked.

"So we can prove Mulan is capable of doing anything to that mean Captain, so all we have to do is defeat him, and bring him back!" Mushu punched his hand with the other. "We gotta convince him!"

"Hmm...if you think about it, maybe he's the reason why there are a ton of Heartless running around," Sora pointed out.

"If we get him, the Heartless are gone," Donald nodded in approval.

"But is he really in the cave? And how do you know?" Aseles looked toward Mushu.

Donald nodded, "Yeah, what happens if we go there and he's not there at all?"

"Don't worry, he'll be there, my source is solid!" Mushu grinned, "And then Mulan will reclaim her family's honor! It'll be a piece of cake!"

Aseles suddenly had the feeling this was going to be a bad idea...

## Assistance

"All right, here's the cave," Mushu said, pointing to, well, the cave. It was a little farther out of the campsite at its exit, so it took no time to get there.

"Let's go," Sora said, going inside the snowed covered cave as the rest of the group followed. As Aseles entered, she saw a narrowed but wide tunnel at the end, leading to the silenced cave at the left. Was Shan-Yu really there, waiting unexpectedly of their arrival? Either way....the cave was simply too eerie to be in.

Sora broke the silence, easing his way along the wall as the rest of the group did the same, "On the count of 10, we charge, okay?" They nodded and stood in positions, ready to ambush the Hun leader and waiting patiently for Sora's command.

"1...2...10! Sora yelled and the whole group charged inside. However, Aseles's eyes traveled around the cave. There was nothing but a little statue at the end and some candles set lit around. It looked...set up.

"No one's in here," Mulan stated.

Aseles's eyes narrowed, looking around the deserted area, "No... We're not alone." Everyone looked at her, but did not question the vulnerability of their positions. Everyone took out their weapons, and Aseles waited, trying to locate where this dark energy was bursting from.

She quickly looked up, "There!"

"Thunder!" Donald shot out. A rage of electricity shot upward and a bundle of the huge Heartless from the mountains before shot downward toward the ground, shaking it terribly. Aseles staggered on her feet, trying to regain her balance as she skidded to the side. Suddenly, the corner of her eye caught something leaving the battle scene: was it Shan-Yu?

Without warning she ran to the exit, Goofy and Donald noticing and following right behind. Donald and Goofy were suddenly stopped by even more Heartless outside the area as Aseles continued forth, leaving the cave to chase the mysterious person alone.

Outside, she ran out of the darkened place and turned toward the village, seeing it was completely burnt to the ground with the snow sizzling at the foot of the disaster. She gasped: this was a set-up, a trick to distract the whole group all along...

Aseles turned back up the snowy slope, seeing the figure clearly and finally able to see his shrewd face: it must be Shan-Yu. He continued his racing pace as Aseles followed right behind, gasping with her breath swirling around her freezing face. Heartless broke her way but she quickly ridded of them in a couple of swings, and continued to follow Shan-Yu with the anger plunging to maximum. He finally stopped at a steep hill of snow, looking down at her and she froze.

He wore a poncho of stitched fur, with his dark hair a greasy mess behind his head, and his sharp, black pupils glinting deviously. His grin made Aseles shiver but she wasn't planning on backing down now, with help or no help. He pulled out a sword that was bent in zigzags and he quickly rushed unexpectedly toward Aseles, attacking as she now began to block.

After a couple of harsh swings, Aseles changed the playing field and swung, missing, but quickly faced her keyblade forward, "Take this!" Shan-Yu dodged her swing, but lost footing, staggering on his feet. Aseles sought her chance and struck across but it was suddenly blocked. Aseles tried to pull back her keyblade, but found herself now flying across the air, elbowed massively and

landing hard in the snow ten feet away. Aseles coughed roughly, the wind knocked out of her. She quickly recovered when she saw Shan-Yo charging once more. She pointed her keyblade forward, her teeth gritting.

"Fire!" Aseles shouted, and a scorching set of flames whipped out from the tip of her keyblade, unknowing how she was able to conjure the spell. Shan-Yu was caught in the attack, and was sent backwards, along with Aseles from the huge collision. She opened her eyes to find him charging once more. He grabbed her keyblade in his hand, the other ready to swing his sword to her.

Aseles gritted her teeth, "Fire!" A massive explosion resumed on contact as Aseles fell back hard onto the snow again, coughing as the ash began to build among the air. She staggered on her feet, seeing the smog drop and seeing no figure of the large man. He was gone-

Aseles's throat gurgled as she was snacked at the throat, her feet kicking strongly in front of her. The large fingers squeezed as Aseles gasped, feeling her lungs losing air. Shan-Yu lifted his grin to her view, and lifted his sword, ready to strike. Just then, he yelled in agony and dropped Aseles to the ground. Aseles clutched her throat as she drunk in the air, feeling a pair of hands helping her up.

"Are you okay?" Mulan and Goofy asked, brushing the snow off of her back.

"Y-Yeah..." Aseles nodded, looking up to see it was Sora who drove Shan-Yu away from her. Donald stood boldly by Sora's side, the two looking up. The rest of you followed gaze, seeing Shan-Yu had made it to the top of the large slope.

The man was grinning from ear to ear, pointing his sword toward the group. The group stared anxiously, but they widened to see hundreds of Heartless coming down the slope, their bodies hovering in the air.

"Oh.....great," Sora exhaled. "Anyone up for ideas?"

"...I have one..." Mulan hesitatingly spoke. Sora gestured her to hurry and she did so, Goofy and Aseles quickly preparing for the worst.

"That is...a lot of Heartless," Aseles shuddered.

"We can take them!" Goofy gave a thumbs up.

"We don't have to!" Donald called out toward the two of them. Goofy and Aseles exchanged glances, and saw Donald and Sora huddling, pressing their weapons together. Mulan pointed upward, at a nearby mountain cliff above the slope. With a nod Sora and Donald shouted, and their weapons began to light up tremendously in a heat wave. The scorching, red flame began to turn into a large orb, swiftly melting the snow at their feet, making them slightly sink to the birth floor below. The fire spell collected as Goofy gripped onto Aseles's shoulder, Aseles taking a step back as Mulan shot her eyes up to the approaching Heartless and charging Shan-Yu.

"Ready.....STEADY.....FIRE!" Mulan threw her arm forward. The fire spell immediately left the tip of the weapons and went blazing across the area, catching several Heartless in the way. The orb, as big as a car, had met its mark on the arching mountain, and there was a loud rumble. The ground horribly shook as the snow began to run downwards. They had caused an avalanche.

"Run!" Sora ordered as he, Donald and Mulan began to run down, the snow boulders and ice raining down and overpowering the Heartless at the top of the slope. The falling snow quickened its pace, approaching fast as it then caught Shan-Yu in the attack.

"In here!" Goofy pointed to an opening at the mountain side. Aseles tried to pick up her feet as

best as she could, but found Sora, Donald and Mulan quickly passing her. Jeezes, it was impossible to run in the snow! The snow began to drift down faster as Aseles shot her eyes to the right and up, seeing the cloud of snow now only yards away.

“Aseles, keep running!” Sora ordered, outstretching his hand to her. Aseles panted heavily as she flew across the air, and extended her arm forward. Sora and Mulan quickly snatched Aseles and tugged her in, the snow cloud now engulfing the small cave.

“FIRE!” Donald positioned himself in front, and a roaring set of flames began to circulate at the entrance, making sure that none of the rushing snow would collapse inside. Thinking that they would be scorched alive, the fire subsided and Aseles breathed deeply, holding onto her abdomen. The air turned cold immediately as the group began to peek their heads out, seeing the whole place was clean cut of any of the Heartless, and Shan-Yu was now definitely gone.

Sora walked out first to make sure it was secure, and then signaled it was fine as the group followed. They began to walk down the slope, and Sora peered over the edge of the mountain, whistling to the large drop below.

“He couldn’t have survived that,” Donald noted.

“Let’s hope not,” Sora wiped his forehead off. “Everyone alright?”

“Yeah,” Mulan replied, patting herself down, “That was scary- Wait...where’s Mushu?” Mulan’s eyes widened as she looked about.

“He’s not with you?” Aseles’s mouth dropped.

“Troops!” Your eyes shot up toward the exit of the mountain, seeing it was Captain Shang. The five looked at one another, but hurried forward, and saluted to the Captain. “Well done, and Ping, I’m impressed of your tactic of using the environment to your advantages,” Shang replied.

“...Really? Well- I mean, thank you, Captain!” Mulan saluted.

“You have my trust. The village was burned down, but we can continue forth. Shan-Yu is finally defeated, and we can report-“ Shang shot his eyes to the loud voice that had interrupted his speech.

“Mulan, why did you leave me like that!” Mushu groaned, rising from the bundle of snow and smacking the snow off of his scales. Sora, Donald and Aseles gave frantic looks to him, slicing the air in front of their throats to silence him. Goofy covered his mouth as Mulan bit her lip, Shang keeping his eyes locked on the dragon, “You know I don’t like it when you just leave me to fend for myself!” Mushu blinked toward the group, smacking his lips. He blinked, catching their grim expressions, and then shot his eyes to his left, barely spotting Shang. He clamped his jaws shut. Whoops.

“Mulan, a woman?!” Shang shot, darting his eyes to Mulan. His eyes suddenly shot to Aseles, “TWO?!” Aseles’s eyes widened, and barely realized that her hair had cut loose from the poor wristband that she had made back at the camp. It must’ve disappeared with the snow. Well, double crap.

"I trusted you, and the rest of you knew, right!?" Shang glared toward Sora, Donald and Goofy. Sora rubbed his head nervously, opening his mouth to say something, but before he could- “All of you are expelled from the army....” Shang began to take his leave, disappearing from sight.

"Sorry, it’s my entire fault," Mushu said after a few moments of silence, slacking his once, proud posture. The group of four said nothing as Mulan gave a smile, walking over to him.

"No, it's not," Mulan said, picking him up and giving him a kiss on his cheek. Wait...it wasn't? That made....no sense. "Well, all we can do is go home now. Hope my father won't get mad at me that much," she finished. Mulan smiled as she placed Mushu down, and began to take off her soldier suit. Underneath she wore a gray tunic, outlined in green with her solid tights and slip-on shoes. She removed her hairband, letting her bangs fall flat on her forehead with her hair resting above her shoulders in a straight bob.

"Don't worry," Sora smiled warmly to her, placing his arms around Donald, and Goofy's shoulders, "We'll take the blame too. Right?" He looked over to Aseles. Before Aseles could answer, the shout of a horrific yell sprang up from under the cliff's side. Aseles ran over as the others followed, and all of them kneeled to see something moving down the slope of the fifty story drop. It was Shan-Yu. This man was clearly made of perseverance fluids.

"He's heading toward the Imperial City!" Mulan said pointing at the Hun leader in the distance that was now heading down the mountain toward the city in the distance. He already had an advantage; it was nothing but sliding slopes down the mountains from where he was.

"Let's go!" Sora ordered as the rest of the group began to run down the mountain and headed toward the city as well, hoping to stop Shan-Yu and his cunning plan.

#### AT THE IMPERIAL CITY DOORS:

It was the fastest and most tiring run ever, but Aseles managed to cross down the snowy mountain with the group, past the burned village, down the dirt mountain path, and across the first campsite to finally arrive in view of the city. Approaching the tall walls, Mulan took the lead in finding the Imperial Palace where the ruler of China was at. They soon ended up in a huge, concrete area where a bridge led to the tall doors up a long staircase.

Though, Aseles's eyes averted to the area in front, spotting Shang, and noticed that Shan-Yu had arrived, standing before him. He suddenly knocked Shang back with the handle of his sword, leaving the Heartless that he had brought with him to keep him busy. The whole group ran and stood beside Shang, facing the enemies and standing in front of the Captain.

"We'll handle this Captain!" Sora said with a nod, "Go save the Emperor!" Shang was shocked at Sora's response, but quickly nodded and ran to the palace gates, knowing the urgency of the matter.

Only after a few moments, the Heartless were throwing rushing bolts of lightning and smacked their large, long bodies against the ground, making it quake. Aseles dodged up and slashed her keyblade against one, sending it toward Donald who froze it on contact. Next Goofy shot his shield across, cutting it into pieces as Mulan and Sora teamed up with Mushu to take down three Heartlesses at once. Mulan was more skilled without her second identity keeping her down, and she cut clean across the enemies with her blade as Mushu fired thousands of flame orbs toward Sora's keyblade who then smacked them like a bat game. It was in no time that they were defeated, and after collection the group began to run toward the gates, seeing Shang trying to close the gates as Shan-Yu tried to stop him. Sora ran forward and tossed his keyblade across the air, knocking Shan-Yu back. The keyblade spun back in Sora's hand as Shang then successfully closed the doors, Shan-Yu outraged by the turn of events.

"You aren't passing these doors without a fight!" Sora replied as the rest stood at his side, all lined against the entry way into the palace. Shan Yu stood, took his sword out, and headed with no hesitation.

Unfortunately, he's almost blocked every move. It was as if no scratch could reach this man, and

his endurance was impeccable to keep up with. His blade pierced and sang triumphantly when it cut the air, and it seemed fighting him alone would not win.

"Keep him occupied!" Sora nodded to Donald and Goofy. The duo nodded as they rushed forward, but in a matter of seconds, they were knocked back.

"I'll do it!" Aseles spun her keyblade in hand and charged forward, striking her keyblade as best as she could against Shan-Yu. He smirked at her small stature, and plummeted her with a variety of swings, making her stagger. But no matter how many times the leader tried to throw her off, Aseles was sure to get back on her feet, and block the coming blows. Her arms shook and screamed, but she kept up pace. Just when she thought she couldn't handle anymore, Shan-Yu grunted and stumbled forward, almost landing on her. Aseles swung across, throwing him back, and found him rushing forward away, Sora having smacked him. Aseles swung powerfully with both hands, sending him skidding toward Mulan's direction. She readied herself and spun her sword to and fro, knocking the man to the ground.

Shan-Yu grunted in rage as he stood, but he was too late to counter against Sora's dash. Sora swung his weapon successfully across, skidding to a halt. He straightened up and looked behind to see Shan-Yu fall to the ground, his body breaking down into dark dust. After a few moments, a heart appeared bright pink. Aseles stared at it in awe, and felt a sense of sadness to see it disappear in a flicker into the sky.

Mulan walked to where Shan-Yu once laid, picking up his deadly sword and facing the group with a smile. The doors of the huge palace opened as they all turned, seeing Shang, and the Emperor of China coming out of the palace doors, along with the men who had made a fuss at the lunch line before.

The Emperor spoke, looking at the group as it made it to the last step, "Thank you all for saving me."

"No problem!" Sora, Donald, Goofy said in unison, smiling. Mulan bowed down instead while Aseles followed her example.

"Ah, Fa Mulan," the Emperor looked at her, his warm, soft eyes expanding, "I have heard of you. Running away from home...stealing your father's suit...and impersonating as a soldier...but I thank you." He gave a generous smile as Mulan stood shocked, but smiled back. At least she didn't get as much trouble as she thought she would.

"I would like to give you an offer. Would you accept to aid Captain Li Shang by protecting me?" he asked.

"Yes, of course!" Mulan nodded eagerly. "It would be my honor."

"Mulan...you were great..." Shang walked nervously forward, holding his hand out to her. She took it, shaking it softly and then let go, "And I would like to say I'm...uh..."

"Apology accepted," Mulan finished for him. Suddenly her grip began to glow as Shan-Yu's sword began to illuminate a bright lavender. Mulan released the sword, but it hovered in midair and began to rise. In an instant the sky darkened, the floor glowed, and a keyhole appeared in the sky. Sora pointed his flashing keyblade to it, a ray of light shooting out and then the sound of a lock pounding in the air.

The glowing ceased and Sora called off his keyblade, turning to look at Mulan and Shang, "Sorry, but we've got to go."

"We will we get to see you again, right?" Mulan asked, the sword of Shan-Yu once again in her

hand and Shang standing close beside her.

"Promise," Sora finished, and then he smirked, pointing to the two. "Oh yeah, you guys play nice okay?" Mulan and Shang darted their eyes to each other, their cheeks blushing red.

"Easy, soldier!" Shang pointed a finger back to him, but the damage had already been done. Aseles rolled her eyes, shaking her head as Donald and Goofy snickered behind the grinning Sora. The group of four waved off Mulan's group as they began to make their way out of the palace doors.

And to Aseles's surprise, the ship did indeed come back.

LATER:

Aseles sat silently in her seat, concerned of the events that were now unraveling. It seemed the Heartlesses did not act in their own accord sometimes, and took the command of someone else higher ranking than they were. Was it possible that someone higher than Shan-Yu was controlling them to invade the worlds? And why invade them? It had something to do with that glowing, pink heart Aseles saw earlier.

"Hey." Aseles looked up seeing it was Sora who took the seat next to her. Donald and Goofy seemed to be bothered by why some of the buttons wouldn't push, but Aseles hoped it was nothing serious.

She turned to look at him instead, "Hey..."

"Hmm? Is something wrong?" Sora asked, leaning in a bit with his elbows on his knees.

"Well...I'm confused for the most part...." Aseles began. Sora waited as she continued, "What are the Heartless looking for...if they're invading worlds?"

Sora grimaced slightly, "They're looking for people to steal their hearts."

Aseles froze, "...Wait...their hearts? Why would they steal hearts?"

"Because they all want one for themselves," Sora replied.

"Is Organization XIII controlling them?" Aseles asked next.

Sora shook his head, "I don't see how they can....I mean, we don't know what their plan is for sure. It's odd. The Heartlesses were already supposed to be vanquished, but it doesn't seem like any of it subsided after we defeated a certain someone because of it. He started the pool of Heartlesses." He opened his mouth again after several thoughts, "All that matters is stopping the Heartless and Organization XIII."

"Yeah...I guess you're right," Aseles shrugged. "Though I don't see why I'm sticking around then."

"Hey, you did great out there!" Sora encouraged, patting Aseles on the shoulder, "How long have you had that keyblade for?"

"Not very long to be honest. I didn't know what it was when I got it," Aseles shrugged again, looking up to Sora plaintively.

Sora blinked to her, "How did you get it then...if you don't mind me asking?" Aseles sighed, but she shook her head, unsure how to describe the events prior to her obtaining it. It was somewhere



dark...and cold.... “Never mind, forget I asked then,” Sora waved a hand. Aseles looked up to see him smiling, “Just get some rest, we’re going to need it.”

Aseles agreed as Sora stood up and began to take wheel of the ship from Donald, Goofy stretching and yawning in the seat he was once sitting in. Aseles quirked her mouth to one side, but sat back in her seat, looking out to the sky with an expressionless face, unsure where this was leading to....or if she was going to find answers.....

FFW:

Aseles yawned and opened her eyes, looking forward to look around the control panel, seeing Sora, Donald and Goofy still controlling the ship. She sat up and felt something slip down her shoulders. She jumped at the sensation, but controlled her thoughts to find....Sora’s jacket over her. She gripped it gently in possession, soothing the fabric with her thumbs. A huge crease of blush formed, and she waited until it subsided enough to sit up straighter and signal she was awake.

“Hey, Aseles,” Goofy greeted, along with a waving Sora and Donald. Sora was now merely wearing a sleeveless, navy shirt, his crown necklace gently sliding forward on its chain as he leaned forward to look at her.

“..Heey...” Aseles whispered, feeling the blush back on. She cleared her throat, “Where are we headed?”

“To a castle, loook,” Goofy replied, pointing forward. Aseles followed, and even from the atmosphere of the world, she spotted a large castle indeed in sight in scenery of night. By the mere looks of it outside....it must’ve held hundreds of rooms inside.

The ship landed roughly, but smooth enough to stand up as it did. Quickly Aseles unbuckled herself and held onto Sora’s jacket, hugging it to herself. She blushed again as Donald and Goofy began to modify some of the buttons and controls. Aseles began to head to Sora who was now barely standing, and looked to Aseles with a warm smile.

Aseles held out the jacket to him, hunching her head slightly, “...Thank you.”

His bright eyes gleamed, and he took it gently, placing it back on him, “You’re welcome. You looked cold while you were sleeping.” Aseles blushed further; he was watching her sleep. She hoped she didn’t do anything stupid while he was.

Shortly after, the four left the cockpit of the gummi ship and touched onto the stone floor. The gummi ship rose to the sky and disappeared in a flicker of light. The group had landed on a stone bridge, down the left side of Aseles a pair of black gates leading to some howling, dark woods, and a pair of huge doors to the right. Sora led the way with Aseles close beside Donald and Goofy. Sora opened the large wooden doors, and revealed a courtyard of stone statues standing around a decorated ring at the center of the ground. There was a pair of stairs leading to the front doors of the castle, exaggeratedly tall in stature. Overall, the presence of this world was not very pleasing to the new comers.

Sora began to head to the doors, gripping onto the metal ring for the handle and heaved, but the door did not budge. He tried again, but to no avail. He rolled his eyes and flashed out his keyblade, pointing the tip of it toward the keyhole. There was the sound of the door unlocking, and the door budged as Sora’s heave.

“You think it’s a good idea to go inside?” Aseles timidly asked.

“Yeah, it’ll be fine!” Sora chimed, walking in.

Donald stared at him, and then turned to Aseles, "Just stay close." Aseles immediately latched her arms around Goofy's, making him grunt. "...That works," Donald commented. Goofy walked in as Aseles clung onto him.

The lobby of the castle was far more extravagant than Aseles was anticipating, with decorated columns holding up the structure. It looked much like a gothic-design, with a pair of long stairs leading upward to a set of main doors at the center where the red rug the group stood on led to. The place could very well be a ballroom itself, and Aseles tried to imagine it was lit...for her sake. Rounding the main doors, there were two sets of stairs, one leading to the west side, and the other to the east.

"This place is huge!" Donald said with awe.

"SHHH!" Sora clamped the duck's beak shut. Donald's shout echoed among the castle, and all was still. Sora sighed, darting his eyes to Donald, "Do you want us to get caught?!"

"Me? You're the one that suggested coming in here!" Donald whispered back.

"A Heartless!" Goofy waved a frantic finger forward. A Heartless indeed had appeared from the ground in the middle of the rug, and was heading toward an opened door at the right. Immediately, the group ran after it. Sora banged open the doors, seeing a fireplace in the center-end of the room, a table at a corner, and two other tables that were at the end sides of the entrance, looking like a parlor. However, no Heartless was in sight.

"You sure it went in here?" Aseles asked, looking about. She ducked her head under a table, but found nothing. Goofy and Sora went to the other end of the room, but found nothing as well.

"Hey, look at this...." Donald said in a trance. The group turned, seeing him pointing to a beautiful red rose in a glass vase that was at the corner of the room. He headed toward it, his arms extended forward to it. Without warning the Heartless suddenly appeared in front of him, waving its antennas about. "Found it!" Donald screamed.

The Heartlesses were in abundance as the group prepared themselves and fought viciously against the oncoming enemies, but it wasn't long before they were all gone. Quickly as it began, the fight ended easily, but now all attention was toward the rose that Donald had pointed out. Aseles was transfixed of its beauty, seeing it glowing red. Something was enchanted about it, and it captivated not only her gaze, but everyone else's.

"What is it?" Sora questioned.

"It's a rose," Donald raised an eyebrow.

Sora sighed heavily, "I know it's a rose!"

"There's something different about it," Goofy tilted his head, pressing his hand on his chin.

"I don't think we should touch it," Aseles cautiously took a step back. She swiftly turned, and there standing silently by the doors was a monstrous figure. She yelped in fright as Sora quickly went over, and clamped his hand against her mouth. Aseles's eyes widened to see the figure approaching, but Sora soon let go, and was casually walking toward it.

"What is he doing?!" Aseles flailed her arms toward Donald and Goofy, but they didn't seem worried and smiled at the towering, brunette beast, dressed with torn, lavender pants and a purple cloak. Its dark horns curved on the edges of its forehead, and its blue eyes shot toward the approaching Sora.

"Hey, Beast!" Sora said, giving a friendly wave. They knew this.....Beast?? However, this Beast narrowed his eyes, and this alarmed Aseles right away. He then started to stride toward Sora. He suddenly pushed aside Sora, sending him stumbling backwards. Aseles caught him as Donald and Goofy now took the defensive in front of Sora and Aseles, but they were merely sent crashing and tumbling to the wall at the far side.

"Hey, what's the matter with you?!" Sora said, obviously shocked that Beast was behaving like this. He then pushed Sora and Aseles aside, sending them both to the other wall. Aseles grunted as she fell on her side, looking up to see his saddened eyes glaring at the rose, HIS rose. He held it around his firm claws, holding it against his chest. He then walked toward the exit of the room, and disappeared from the Parlor.

"What's wrong with him?" Goofy asked as he and Donald stood up.

"I don't know, but we've got to find out why," Sora answered. Well...here we go...again.

"How do you know him?" Aseles asked. They must be mad to just approach someone like that, especially someone that they didn't know.

"He helped us in our last adventure, and he's a friend. Would you help us?" Sora explained briefly.

"Uh, yeah, of course," Aseles shrugged. What choice did she have, wait in the gummi ship? Probably not. Plus, he was their friend, and perhaps something was wrong, so why not help? With that settled the group began to head toward the exit of the Parlor and ended up in the enormous lobby again. Aseles gazed upward toward the east side of staircases, seeing a figure duck away from view, and the sound of footsteps penetrated the quiet hallway.

"Someone's up there," Aseles quickly interjected, pointing to the east platform of stone.

"Alright, let's go!" Sora replied as the group began to keep up pace with him. Opening the doors, it revealed gloomy scenery, a pair of stairs that led to a darkened hallway. Statues stood on the left with huge, blurry windows on the right. Slowly and more cautiously, the group began to make their way up and into the hall. Along the way, Aseles stopped, looking at a statue that stood firmly at her left side.

It was shaped like a weird monster with an axe in its monstrous hands. She leaned a bit closer to it and stared intently. She flashed out her keyblade, and tapped it with the tip of it. It didn't budge.

"What are you doing?" Donald asked, giving a puzzled look as Sora and Goofy tilted their heads.

"Nothing, I just got a feeling that it-" There was a loud smash, smoke covering Aseles's face. The statue moved forward, and it raised its weapon, ready to strike down. Sora smashed it just in time from letting it attack, turning it into ash behind Aseles. Holy...crap. THE HECK!?

The group turned forward to look at the other four statues detaching themselves from the walls, Heartless symbols planted onto their stone abdomens. The dust collected as they rushed forward. Sora, Donald, Goofy and Aseles each took one, but sadly enough it was not easy to fend off like Sora was making it to be.

Aseles couldn't even swing and hit it her foe as Sora managed to finish his Heartless first, and was quickly helping Donald and Goofy with theirs. Aseles did not wish to be leveled down and began to immensely fight against the spear deflecting her attacks. The Heartless twirled and rushed behind her, swinging its sharp weapon against her back. Aseles fell to the floor, feeling the burning pain. She quickly turned onto her back, missing the stabbing spear in her direction.

Aseles shot her keyblade up, pointing it right at its face, "Fire!" The flames erupted in a large blaze as the Heartless waved its face to and fro, but suddenly began to heat up its spear in the flames. Aseles's eyes widened as she rolled to the side, and began to run down the hall. She fell from a bump in the rug and her keyblade clattered to the floor. Aseles curled up immediately as she could feel the Heartless looming over her, but then her body was met with a splash of rock and stone. She coughed as the dust cleared up; looking past her bangs to see Donald had taken the initiative and delivered the final blow to her Heartless.

"Heal," Sora said, pointing his shining keyblade toward Aseles as she stood. A green glow emerged among Aseles, and she felt instantly better. She picked up her keyblade from the ground, looking up to Sora with a thank you.

"Let's keep going," Sora nodded. The rest nodded and followed right behind, appearing before the doors at the end of hallway. Sora opened them, revealing a room with a luxurious bed, a window with a balcony and a table with a candle next to the entrance. It seemed this room was fitted for a princess. However, where had the footsteps come from?

"Who are you?" a voice rang. The group turned around to see a woman heading out of the shadows at the end of the room. She wore a white, collared shirt under her blue dress, her white apron over it. Her long, brown hair was tied in a ponytail as her radiant brown eyes shot toward the four. She had pink filled cheeks, and soft, full lips.

"Oh, it's you!" the woman said, hugging Donald immediately, well....strangling him that is. "Donald! Goofy, Sora!" she cheered.

"Belle!" Goofy said.

"Let go of me!" Donald said, limping in her grasp.

"Oh! Sorry," Belle said, letting go of Donald as he fell on the floor gasping. "Who are you?" she asked, referring to Aseles.

"I'm Aseles," she replied.

She gave a smile, "It's a pleasure to meet you." She then turned toward Sora, "How come you're here? If I knew it was you in the lobby, I wouldn't have ran away."

"We just dropped by. But then the castle is swarming with Heartless, and Beast is acting strange," Sora replied.

"Ah yes," she nodded, her smile disappearing. "Beast has been acting strangely indeed. He's even locked his servants in the dungeon." Wow...

"Don't worry, we'll help!" Sora finished, making another smile reappear on Belle's face.

"Thank you so much!" Belle said, quite excited to have help.

"So, tell us, where's the dungeon?" Goofy asked.

"It's on the West Wing, at the far end of the hallway," she answered. Sora agreed as Belle agreed to stay safely in her room.

MOMENTS LATER:

The entrance of the West Wing was on the opposite staircase in the lobby, but instead the room wing consisted of a large hallway with light this time. A luxurious red rug ran along the floor as

several, metal soldiers stood on either side of the hallway. Sora, Donald, Goofy and Aseles turned to the right and spotted the rug continuing on, down another large hallway.

"She said it's around here...not going up the stairs," Sora replied, looking among the hallway back and forth.

"Are you sure she said here?" Donald questioned, scanning his eyes around.

"Oh, there!" Aseles pointed past the past, toward a large cabinet standing in front of a hidden door at the end. She ran toward it as the others follow behind her, but she spotted was a wardrobe of some sort, craved elegantly with curves and golden rims along the outer edge of its soft wood and handles.

"That must be the dungeon door!" Donald said, pointing behind the wardrobe. Indeed, there was a single door leading into the wall.

"Yup, it's there all right. But we have to move this first," Sora said, pushing the wardrobe out of the way of the door.

"Hey, I was sleeping!" the wardrobe suddenly yelled. The four jumped. The peach-colored wardrobe suddenly grew a face, its large eyes looking down at the four. It huffed as her pink lips pouted at the sight of them

"And I thought Donald was weird!" Aseles replied.

"Hey!" Donald spat back.

"Anyways, can you please move?" Sora turned toward the wardrobe.

"No! Now let me get some sleep!" she said, pushing Sora away and heading back to her slumber. Well....yeah, that was weird.

"Hmm...now what?" Goofy asked.

"We move it of course! Sora, push it!" Aseles whispered. He nodded, and began to heave the wardrobe out of the way from her side. Aseles quickly saw the wardrobe opening her eyes, and she signaled Sora to stop. He did so. The wardrobe just smacked her lips and kept on sleeping.

"Help me, Donald," Sora whispered. Donald sighed as he went forward, and began to heave the wardrobe as well, Goofy taking a safe position behind Aseles. As the duo continued to push, Aseles made sure to make them stop when the wardrobe began to stir. Finally, she was out of the way, and Sora began to jiggle the door handle of the dungeon while the rest of the group waited to go inside.

"I thought I told you to not move me!" the wardrobe huffed, beginning to push the four out of the way again. For crying out loud... "Why did you move me from my spot!?" she demanded.

"We just want to rescue the servants," Goofy said.

"Oh....why didn't you say so? I'll let you pass," she nodded, smiling. The group of four sulked, Aseles smacking her forehead mainly. "But when you get in there, you might be in for a shock," she said.

"Why?" Sora asked.

"For I was a maid of the castle," she began. Oh joy, here comes a story, "It happened in a dark

and stormy night..." she stated, almost whispering as the group neared closer to her. They waited for her to continue, "But that's all I'm going to tell you, you'll hear the rest of the story with the other servants."

"Okay, let's just get going," Sora said, opening the door with the rest of you following.

When he opened the doors, there revealed a dungeon alright. Boxes piled up at the sides beside and against the walls. At the center end of the room, there stood a pair of old and molded doors, two monstrous statues striking out of them. They looked awfully a lot like a Heartless, with sharp horns, jaws, and humungous claws hanging at the sides.....It couldn't possibly move. It was made out of stone, right?

The door leading out to the hallway closed, but Aseles was quick to go to it, and found...that it would not open. Her eyes widened as she looked toward the three who had ventured easily forth, looking to the door. Sora took out his keyblade, and reached forward to the doors with one hand....

The molded monsters suddenly cracked open from their prison, their screeches blowing back Sora's hair as he held his ground. He deflected their slamming arms as Donald and Goofy quickly shot forward, Donald throwing an ice spell, but it had little effect. The Heartless merely hit Donald back, sending him crashing to a pile of boxes. Goofy was next to charge, but he had little effect as well as he was tossed the same direction as Donald, crashing into a set of instruments, the clatter so nosy Aseles had to cover her ears.

Aseles swung her keyblade out and rushed forward to assist Sora, but she was knocked back as she rolled across the ground. Sora swiftly turned to look at her, but it was the wrong move as he was sent flying upward, his back hitting the ceiling. He landed in a pile of boxes on the same side as the others, and Aseles quickly rushed over, slapping her hands on her cheeks.

"Come on guys, get up!!" Aseles shook the boxes that they laid on, but neither Donald or Sora budged. She hurried over to Goofy, but he was out cold. Great.....

Aseles turned to look at the Heartless avert their attention to her, but their eyes hungered for the unconscious ones among the rumble. They reached forward, but Aseles did not hesitate to throw a large fire spell against their claws. They screeched as Aseles hurried forward, smacking one arm and dodging the other. She stood at the center of the room, pointing her keyblade at the Heartless.

"Hey, you! OVER HERE!" The Heartless shot its eyes to her, and roared, sending her hair flying back.

"Do you need some help??" Aseles swiftly turned to look up at the balcony up of the room, seeing a small figure standing on the railing. He wore a black cloak, his rounded ears instantly giving out he was a mouse. He flashed his arm across in front of him, and a glimmer of light radiated. A keyblade shined in his hand.

Aseles needed all the help she could get.

## Connection

Without hesitation, the stranger and Aseles began to fight the chaotic Heartless.

Compared to him, Aseles knew he was well adapted that Aseles herself knew she could not achieve. The agility is remarkable and his combo strikes were well insync with each other that Aseles knew this little mouse was doing all the work and Aseles herself was just lagging behind, trying her best. He must've had that keyblade for some time now.

"Okay, you and the others can take it from here," the mouse stated. The Heartless was lagging on its defenses, but was still fighting wrathfully to defend its position on the doors.

"But they're still knocked out," Aseles immediately pointed out to the trio.

"I'll wake them up. But promise me this: you won't tell them I was here, got it?" he finished. Aseles stared at him, perplexed of his request. Was he playing the silent hero...or did he really not want to tell them that he was here?

The intensity of the request befuddled Aseles, but she complied, "I promise."

He nodded and jumped on top of a platform that was above the entrance. He reached into his pocket and pulled his gloved hand out, white orbs appearing and then dispersing to each individual head of the trio. Aseles toward them to see that they were now regaining consciousness, though her eyes darted back up to the balcony to look at the little mouse one last time. He was gone, without a trace.

Aseles quickly regained her position of vulnerability and whirled around, only to be hit across the stomach and flung forward onto the ground. Donald, Goofy and Sora were quick on their feet as Goofy helped Aseles to her feet while Sora and Donald began to charge toward the Heartless.

"C'mon Goofy, let's finish this," Aseles quickly cut in and charge, dashing past Sora and Donald and aiding in the array of attacks. Finally, the formation of the beasts began to waver, and with a final swing of Sora's weapon, they crumbled to pieces from the door.

An orb of dark lavender ascended from the remains, but Sora wasted no time in driving it to death. The remains were now dirt and ash.

"They should be right behind the door!" Sora rushed forward, his hands gripping onto the wooden handles and yanking the doors back, revealing nothing but a damp, brick cell of a room, a wooden chair in the center, and a bunch of haystack against the walls. But...that was it...no prisoners.

"Anybody here?" Goofy chimed gently.

"Ah yes, finally some rescuers!" a voice said. The group swiftly looked from left to right, but there was no person belonging to the voice. "Down here!" the voice said again. The group followed the sound of the voice, and could not believe that a candle holder was talking to them. The grip of it was its body, and the two candles resting at its sides were its arms. Its eyes rose in excitement of the group's arrival.

"Hello visitors, you may call me Lumiere," the object bowed its head respectfully. Oh, accent too.

"You're the prisoner?" Donald asked. Lumiere shook his head.

"It's safe to come out, we have rescuers!" Lumiere called out in the room. Needless to say, Aseles

grew more surprised as a set of several objects began to climb out of the haystacks about the prison, one including a small, grandpa designed clock that took the place in the chair. A teapot began to hop her way toward the area with a small teacup that was chipped on the rim following behind her.

"Oh, they *have* come to rescue us!" the teapot stated with glee as the little teacup yipped in excitement, sounding much like a little boy when he did.

"No wonder the wardrobe said that," Sora whispered with the back of his hand covering his mouth. The other three nodded in agreement, and turned their attention to the huddled objects and had made their way to settle around the chair where the clock continued to stand.

"So you have come to rescue us? Allow me to introduce myself, I am Cogsworth," the clock replied proudly.

"Whoa..." Donald lunged his arms toward him with open palms, everyone quickly shuffling out of the way as Cogsworth was gripped.

"Put me down this instant!" Cogsworth argued. Donald just shook him, pressing his ear against his chest to hear his insides rattle.

"So..." Aseles quirked her mouth forward, blinking as Sora and Goofy tilted their heads slightly, looking curiously at the other objects *not* being disturbed by Donald. "How come....you guys are.....not that I judge but.....why....are you.....um..." Aseles rubbed her cheek.

"Can you finish the story about the stormy night?" Sora suggested. "It would help....a lot."

"Well- do you mind!" Cogsworth said, hitting Donald on his bill, releasing him. Donald gripped his beak, soothing it as Goofy patted him on the back.

"It happened in a dark and stormy night..." Cogsworth began when he had composed himself.

"The prince was having a party, but he was selfish indeed. On that particular night, an old woman had come knocking on the door. The prince went to go answer it.

"She had asked to have shelter for the night, but the prince refused," Cogsworth sighed, shaking his head in dismay. The rest looked at one another, and then looked down at Cogsworth again, who continued, "She then said that appearances don't seem of what they appear, but the prince still refused. She then turned into this beautiful enchantress.

This witch turned the prince into a beast. *'Become of what you are'* she said, and then cursed the rest of the castle, for I was the Beast's majordomo."

"I am Mrs. Potts, and I was the Beast's housekeeper," the teapot replied. She looked to the little teacup, "This is my son, Chip."

"And I was the castle's maitre'd," Lumiere responded.

"But what 'bout the rose? It looked very important to him" Goofy asked.

"The rose is very important indeed. The enchantress said when the last petal falls, we will be cursed and stay like this, but if the Beast learns to love and is loved in return before then, the curse shall break," Mrs. Potts finished.

"Wow, what a story," Sora said.

"No kidding..." Aseles scratched her cheek.



"But he's going to find his love!" Goofy added in cheerfully.

"Precisely what I believe!" Lumiere answered determinedly.

"But we need to solve the problem: Why is the Beast acting differently?" Sora inquired.

"Let's go figure it out," Aseles replied, "And find out what is gearing him up lately."

"But we got to get out of here first," Goofy said.

"The problem is, we can't go out the way you came into the dungeon, so we'll have to go to the secret passage way," Lumiere said. It was quickly agreed to head out as the objects led the way out. Lumiere quickly pointed out the balcony where that little mouse had once stood, and as the original four began to stack up the boxes for staircases, Aseles couldn't help but wonder who he really was. Was it such a good idea to lie to Sora, Donald and Goofy as she was traveling with them? Surely, they should've suspected that she couldn't have weakened that Heartless all by herself...unless they had a *ton* of faith in her beginner abilities.

Everyone began to climb up the boxes, opening the gates that were hidden between two soldier statues at the top center of the balcony. It had led to a dark corridor, and inside the dim room Lumiere led the way through the brick wall, stepping through the cracks of the wooden crates that had filled the entire stone cellar. Sora, Donald, Goofy and Aseles began to climb and slide their way through as Lumiere was now jumping on top of each crate in the lead, with Potts, Chip, and Cogsworth following right behind. At the end was the exit passage, where Lumiere once more radiated with light. Sora pushed the doors open after unlocking them with his keyblade, and the group found themselves in the West Wing once more, a little away from the entrance that had led to the dungeon. The wardrobe from before was gone.

"Let's find the master," Cogsworth insisted, leading the way up the staircase in front while Potts, Chip and Lumiere agreed to wait in the Parlor. Sora picked up Cogsworth for quicker travel as he began to direct Sora among the right passage leading to Beast's room. After a few moments of tense silence, the group found themselves in the dark hallway, and Aseles could hear the sound of heaving breathing from behind the door at the far end.

Aseles froze as they approached the doors, Sora retrieving his hand from the doorknob, and looking at her, "What's wrong?"

"...Someone else is inside," Aseles whispered. Sora shot his eyes toward the door, and he crouched down as Donald and Goofy stayed absolutely quiet. He pressed his ear against the door as Cogsworth copied, Aseles already listening intently from behind Donald and Goofy though she was unsure how she was able to.

The man...he was whispering, "Let your anger and frustration out, release it...for you are indeed a beast. Do not deny what is granted to you...."

"That's it!" Sora shot up and kicked the doors inward, the doors smacking against the walls. Donald and Goofy flashed out their weapons as Aseles's eyes widened, catching the man in the black cloak, his figure slowly turning to look at the five that had interrupted.

"Hey, what are you doing here?!?" Donald yelled out. Beside the man was the hunched Beast, his back facing the group.

"Oh, look who's here. If it isn't the keybearer, and his friends," the man calmly stated. Chills ran down Aseles's spine just by hearing his thick chime of a voice. In a wisp he had vanished, and Sora hurried forward, gripping onto Beast's shoulder.

"Beast! Are you alright?" Sora questioned.

"Look out!" Goofy quickly threw Sora out of the way as the large arm flung across, throwing Goofy backwards. Aseles quickly set herself behind him, but stumbled back as she caught him. Her back hit the wall roughly as she groaned, but her eyes shot up to look at the towering Beast that had made his way to them, raising his claw. She noticed a purple and green glow surrounding the outline of his body.

"He's being controlled!" Cogsworth exclaimed in Beast's defense as Sora quickly tossed his keyblade across, knocking Beast onto the damaged, king bed. The wooden posts splintered and fell in halves, and there was that monstrous roar of his.

"Please master, control yourself!" Cogsworth rushed forward, but Sora was quick to grab him, and tossed him to Donald who held tightly onto him.

"I...can't!!!!" Beast roared, rattling the walls around him.

"Hold him down!" Sora ordered. Goofy and Aseles rushed to their feet and charged, Goofy sliding down across and underneath the Beast on his shield like a skateboard. He tugged onto Beast's cloak, tugging it back as Beast tried to whirl around. Aseles took the moment to slam her keyblade's neck against him, and knocked him down with her keyblade pressed against his throat, with his wrists slammed against the ground by her feet. She struggled as Sora was quick to hurry over, and pointed the tip of it against the Beast's face. There was a bright white orb ascending among the keyblade's neck, and Beast huffed angrily...but he had stopped fighting. After a few more pulses of the light, Beast was finally limp and Goofy let go of his cape. Aseles hurriedly stood up, panting slightly from the scare.

"Huh? What...happened?" Beast asked, grabbing his head as he began to stumble onto his feet, easily towering everyone in height. Did he not remember? What had that member done to him?

"You were being controlled, master," Cogsworth said calmly, "by the man in a black cloak."

Beast snapped, "It was Xaldin! He's been controlling me, by using my anger and depression...." He looked away in shame as Sora took a glance toward his group, Cogsworth approaching at Beast's feet, looking up to him. "It looked like he was helping me...How can I have been so foolish," Beast moaned lowly in disapproval. It was quiet for a few moments as the rest of the group waited patiently for Beast to gather his words.

"Well, thank you, Sora, Donald, Goofy, and..." Beast continued, and his eyes looked over to Aseles.

"Aseles," she answered. "We...don't know each other."

"You even locked your servants in the dungeon," Sora added gently, "You don't...remember that?"

"I did?" Beast asked, completely shocked.

"I bet you did it to cause no harm to 'em," Goofy suggested. Oh man...this guy...this guy....so much full of hope for everyone.

"You...think I did?" Beast asked again, unsure of himself now.

"Of course," Donald said.

"Yeah, we know you're not the beast people think," Sora said giving a smile.

"What else....did I do?" Beast asked again.

"You were kind of behaving different with...Belle," Sora replied hesitantly.

"Belle!" Beast said, running out of the room rapidly. Aseles looked back within the room, and noticed that the red, illuminating rose settled at the center of the room. He had brought it here to keep it safe...but...why hadn't that Organization member used it to his advantage when he had the chance? Surely....he wanted Beast for something....

"Let's get going, in case something happens," Sora replied. Aseles was quick to follow behind the leaving group, making sure to close the doors of Beast's room behind her, and Cogsworth thanked her for doing so. She walked behind them with Goofy now holding onto Cogsworth, Sora mostly rubbing his face along the way with Donald scratching his feathered head.

"It was...only a matter of time until they showed up somewhere," Sora shook his head in disapproval, stroking his chin. The group was now in the West Wing again, walking down the steps and heading away from the entrance of the Dungeon.

"They're annoying," Donald crossed his arms firmly, shaking his head.

"Do you guys know anything else about them?" Aseles asked, blinking.

Goofy shook his head, "There really wasn't...much to go on."

"...Well that's not helpful at all," Aseles almost frowned.

"Do you know anything?" Sora asked, turning to look at her from in front.

Aseles shook her head, "No...nothing. I....literally found out what they were when we were at the Bailey with Leon..."

"Hey..." Sora stopped walking for a few moments, looking to Aseles, "How did you end up meeting Leon?"

Aseles scowled now, "He just...found me unconscious...." She shrugged, "Then he took me to Hollow Bastion."

"Oh....I see," Sora nodded to himself, leading the way again now toward the East Wing.

"I think I shall wait for you fellows with the others," Cogsworth replied, and Goofy was happy to put him down. The four watched Cogsworth to make sure he made it to the Parlor safely, and began to make their way toward Belle's Room.

Sora opened the doors when they arrived, but it was indeed occupied. The four peeked within the crack of the door, seeing Beast...but...there was no Belle.

"Belle?" Beast looked around the room.

"She's not here?" Sora opened the door, revealing the entire group. Aseles narrowed her eyes, but she quickly shot around, hearing the piercing scream of a woman from down the hall.

"Belle!" Beast darted through the doors, leaving the others chasing behind him.

"C'mon!" Donald encouraged as the five were now blazing across the passages, making it all the way back to the Grand Hall of the castle. Beast shot down the stairs and looked about, with the doors of the Parlor opening immediately.

"It was Belle!" Lumiere hollered in worry. Sora, Donald and Goofy stood among the top of the stairs. Suddenly Aseles whirled around, and began to hear the shuffle of clothes from within the double doors. She swiftly threw her arms forward, knocking back the large doors to reveal that the red rug had led to a golden-colored ball room.

The beautiful, radiant Ballroom arched around to consist of several, pearl white columns, leading toward the windows at the very end that led out to the balcony. A large chandelier hung among the center of the ceiling, and twinkled from the gems and crystals it held. The floor was colored in yellow and gold tiles, with the walls painted harvest gold until they reached the mural at the curving ceiling that was at least eighty stories above.

Aseles dashed forward with the others and looked about, and finally spotted the struggling Belle at the top of the balcony that rounded above, creating the second story of the place. She was pinned against the chest of the Organization XIII member, her mouth clamped with one gloved hand, the other binding her arms in between her arms.

"Hey, let her go!" Sora shouted.

"I will give her back, but for something in return," he replied back coolly. Aseles could feel him grin underneath that cloak of his. Belle struggled, but she was quickly shushed.

"Name your price...." Beast demanded. The man chuckled, and after a few seconds later, his hand lifted and pointed.....at Aseles. Aseles's eyes widened vastly as she stood still on the spot, all the eyes now shooting to her, from the man, to her, and to the man again.

"What do you want with Aseles?" Donald asked, his wand out.

"I named my price...I will not entitle any other information. Hand her to me, and you will get Belle back," the man replied.

"Beast, no!" Sora swiftly shot his arms forward. Beast took a powerful stomp forward as Aseles staggered backwards, almost tripping as her eyes widened in fear. Sora stood firmly on the spot in front of her, shaking his head to and fro, "No, don't do it!"

"I will have Belle back!" Beast replied firmly.

"MM-MM!" Belle from above frantically shook her head back and forth.

"Silence," the man replied, making her hunch forward. He looked to the group below, "Why do you continue to have a traitor among your group? She is of no value to you, but to us....she is of our kind. Don't you see, she is tricking you."

"No, you're lying!" Aseles immediately retorted, her eyes shining brightly.

"Bring me Aseles, Beast! You will have what you want back!" Donald and Goofy immediately went around Beast, aiding Sora at his sides. All their weapons were drawn as Beast stared at them intently, but he took a step back, and shot his eyes up to the one named Xaldin.

"Oh you won't give me what I want? Then I shall take what I have found," Xaldin sneered.

"No you don't!" Aseles flashed out her keyblade, and swung her keyblade upward in haste. Belle immediately jabbed her way out of Xaldin's grasp, ducking as the keyblade hit Xaldin right square on the chest, making him slam against the wall. The keyblade recoiled back as Aseles caught it.

"Jump, I'll catch you!" Beast opened his arms, and Belle did not hesitate to jump down, caught safely in Beast's arms.

“How. Dare. YOU!” Xaldin grunted as he was now standing on the railing of the balcony, shooting his eyes toward Aseles. “I will bring you back, that is my order! Whether you want to or not!”

He shot his arms upward as the columns of the room suddenly shot up in black color. Abruptly, chains from each column shot out in flying speed as Aseles ducked from one pair, Sora deflecting several as Goofy rebounded the others with his shield.

“Aseles, run!” Sora quickly replied. Aseles was quick to pick up her keyblade as she hurried forward toward the doors, where Belle and Beast urged her to jump.

“Not so fast.” Aseles screamed as she was suddenly gripped from the ankle, and the doors slammed in front of Beast and Belle’s faces. Aseles felt herself sliding uncontrollably across the slippery floor, passing right underneath everyone else as Sora rushed over, but only to be knocked down by the chain. Goofy was wrapped in the binds, but Donald was running forward now, leaping to catch Aseles’s hands.

“I’m afraid not!” Xaldin suddenly shot in sight, and kicked Donald backwards. The duck rolled to a stop, groaning. Aseles felt the dark chains squeezing among her skin, making it burn savagely. She kicked and thrust forward, but the column continued to hold her prisoner. Xaldin now stood in front of her, and gripped her face in his hand. She panted heavily, her face paling as she saw those dark eyes staring deviously at hers from underneath the shadows of the cloak.

“Let’s pay someone a visi-“ Xaldin cried out in agony as he flew to the side, the right side of his cloak scorching and smoking off from the fire and thunder spells combined from the rushing Sora and Donald.

“Take this!” Sora swung his keyblade across, a set of bright light shooting outward like a whip. Xaldin immediately dodged, but Donald shot the final blow forward, sending Xaldin out and shattering against the windows; the shattered pieces fell onto the balcony as Xaldin went over and disappeared into the darkness of the night. The chains among the columns dispersed instantly as Aseles fell forward onto the ground, wincing.

“I think he’s gone,” Goofy nodded, looking over to the windows.

“Aseles, Aseles!” Sora shook her gently on the shoulder. Aseles shuddered in place, gripping tightly onto her keyblade, and staring mindlessly at the floor in fright. Donald walked on her other side and lifted his wand upward, casting a cure spell among the group.

“He’s gone,” Donald reassured, patting the top of her back.

Aseles trembled in place, and began to stand on her feet, still holding onto the handle of her keyblade, “T-T-Thanks...”

“Why did he want to take her....?” Goofy asked worriedly.

“Aseles.....hey, look at me...” Aseles raised her eyes up to look at Sora, seeing him lean in slightly, holding and rubbing her upper arms, “Can you guess why-“

“No,” Aseles immediately answered, her eyes stern. Sora blinked, and she shook her head vigorously, “No....I don’t. I don’t.”

"I think she's telling the truth, fellas," Goofy responded.

“Let’s go check on Beast and Belle then, we’re glad you’re safe Aseles,” Sora replied. “C’mon,

stick close by me.”

#### IN BELLE’S ROOM:

"Beast?" Belle asked, lightly gripping her head with a delicate hand.

Beast swallowed, clearing his throat, "Belle, I'm sorry if I have done anything to hurt you, I really am. I was being controlled by anger and frustration. Can you forgive me?" Beast gently headed in front of her, holding Belle’s soft hands into his rough ones. After a few moments, she was smiling. Beast was about to speak again, "Apology accepted," Belle interrupted.

Beast's frown turned upside, "Belle...thank you," he finished. Though, her eyes were raised at him, and Beast sighed, beginning to turn his direction to Aseles now. She looked up hesitantly up to him, seeing him bow his head, “I’m sorry...for before.” Aseles merely nodded gently, Sora next to her and wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

As the set of events began to farewells, and the appearance of the next keyhole, Aseles’s mind was running off to the distance, and began to question on what had really happened. What did Xaldin mean....part of them? Was....was she a Nobody of some sort?

Sora’s keyblade disappeared from sight, "Sorry, but we've got to go."

"Will you be back?" Lumiere asked, the other set of objects looking toward the four.

"Of course, promise," Sora smiled.

"Don't be strangers, come by anytime you like," Mrs. Potts warmly said.

Donald and Goofy nodded back as Sora signaled it was time to go. Everyone else moved aside from the door as Sora held Aseles gently in his grasp, leading her out as Donald and Goofy walking alongside them on either side, and soon they headed outside of the castle.

#### IN THE GUMMI SHIP:

The ship moved along smoothly in Sora’s grip, with Donald and Goofy quickly in a slumber, leaving Sora and Aseles awake once more.

Aseles was again lost in her thoughts as she rested the side of her face against her rested arms against the chair’s right arm, her eyes rarely blinking as she looked among the set of controls blinking in front. Sora looked in her direction, but said nothing as he looked ahead instead, exhaling sharply.

Apparently, thinking about ship maintenance wasn’t helping as Aseles’s thoughts continued to wander to and fro, only able to feel those chains among her skin, and those black eyes.

"You like the view?" Sora voice boomed.

Aseles jumped from his comment, and rubbed her eyes, looking out of the window to gaze at the stars, “It’s nice...”

“...Xaldin is still in your mind?” Sora asked softly.

“Yes...” Aseles inhaled sharply.

“Just rest then....I’ll wake you up when we get there...” Sora replied again, “Good night, Aseles.”

\*\*\*\*\*

*A black room with no glimpse of light anywhere in view. But...she could see his face so clearly, his eyes covered with a black cloth wrapped around, with silver bangs falling forward onto it.*

*She stepped forward, heading toward him. He stood there, facing her.*

*Now standing in front of him, his face turned whenever she turned hers.*

*"It's been a while..." he replied.*

*"I...don't know you," she replied.*

*"Yes...you do."*

*She turned around, and found herself in a white room. She immediately turned the other way, but found that the boy was gone. Next she looked among the area; she was in some sort of trance....and she began to walk forward, looking about the white hallway.*

*As she continued, there was a pair of doors, and she opened them, revealing a room with white thrones perching upwards, almost reaching up to the ceiling. She was suddenly hauled back, and something clamped among her mouth. She struggled greatly, but she was quickly turned around, her back against one of the sides of the thrones, her eyes darting up to stare at the figure. He lifted up a finger to his shadowed lips, hushing Aseles gently. She stayed quiet as she stopped struggling.*

*The boy reached up, and began to pull back his hood, revealing a set of bright, sky eyes. His golden hair swept to the side, spiking in several places. His tender face...he immediately looked like someone she knew.*

*"W-Who are you?" Aseles felt a sweeping sensation among her stomach.*

*"We've met before," he replied.*

## Feelings

"Aseles, wake up!" Aseles jolted her eyes open to see Sora, Donald and Goofy surrounding her view from above. She took a quick look around, slightly sitting up; she was still in the gummi ship, but she had managed to be lying on the metal, cold floor.

"What... happened?" she stood, gripping onto the arms of the chair uneasily.

"Calm down, it looked like you were having a bad dream," Sora gently pushed her shoulders, making her bottom touch back to her seat. She then looked at Donald and Goofy, seeing them give her a reassuring nod.

After a few moments, Donald and Goofy went back to pilot the ship. However, Sora was still there, sitting on one knee in front of Aseles. The only thing she could do was sink into his sky orbs, somewhat fidgeting with her fingers on her lap.

"It's okay, we're here," Sora stated.

"Thanks," she stated back.

"We're landing!" Donald suddenly shouted, making Aseles jump in surprise in her seat. And indeed, she felt the ship stop completely as Sora stood up after making sure it had steadied.

"We're going to have to jump from the gummi ship," Goofy said. Aseles's jaw dropped as Sora stretched his arms up toward the ceiling. Jump?? To where?!

Aseles walked over to the opening staircase of the ship, Donald having put the ship on auto-pilot. Aseles's eyes screamed as she looked down to the long drop to a dark cavern of some sort. Before she could protest, Sora quickly wrapped his arm around her waist, and he grinned in her direction.

"Don't tell me...you're scared of heights?"

"Don't you dare, Sora!" Aseles quickly whined, fidgeting.

"Looks like you're gonna have to take her down after all," Donald smirked. Aseles shot her red face in his direction, but she felt Sora bolt forward, dragging her along. Aseles flailed her arms as she cried out in surprise, feeling her hair flying upwards with her bangs off of her forehead. She shut her eyes and clamped her hands to her face, but soon she felt the ground beneath her. Sora let her go and Aseles stumbled, clearing her throat quickly and feeling a splotch of bright, red paint on her face.

"Was that so bad?" Sora chuckled.

"...UGH," Aseles rolled her eyes, but watched as Donald and Goofy jumped down next to them. The ship had flown out of sight, leaving the group in a dark cavern of some sort, with a flow of green liquid among the uneven, curving ground. A soft fog of green and also settled among the ground, concealing the group's ankles from view. Aseles was just hoping it wasn't some sort of poison.

"What is this place?" Sora asked as he walked forward, the rest following right behind.

"Well, have we been to this world before?" Goofy asked scratching his nose.

"Nope," Donald shrugged, his eyes darting around the unknown area.



"Look!" Sora yelled. He pointed forward to a woman in the other side of the cave, running desperately as she looked behind her. Your eyes became wide as Aseles saw her pursuers: Heartless. She suddenly tripped, the gang of Heartless gaining on her and jumping in the air above her.

"Thunder!" Donald yelled as he struck his wand up, sending bolts of lightning from above. The spell hit the Heartless directly; turning them to ash as their black remains fell on top of the woman as the four ran to her aid.

Sora and Aseles helped her to her feet first as she sighed heavily, dusting off her purple, tunic-dress. She flipped her high ponytail to the side and let it fall behind her, her bangs curling along her forehead. A woman like her doing in a place like this? Seemed very out of the ordinary.

"Are you all right, ma'am?" Sora asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Her large, lilac eyes looked up toward the group and seemed...unimpressed, "Who are you supposed to be anyways?" What a great way to announce one's presence...and help at that.

"I'm Sora, this is Donald, Goofy, and Aseles," Sora introduced.

"Hi, I'm Megara, but my friends call me Meg...if I had any friends," she said with a smirk, placing her hands on her hips and cocking her hip to one side.

"We're looking for Hercules, do you know him?" Goofy asked.

She suddenly shot her face up brightly with surprise, "You're friends of Wonder Boy? Please, you have got to help him," she said, her face turning instantly into concern.

"What's wrong?" Donald asked.

"Hades won't let Hercules get a break; he's been throwing monster after monster at him in the Coliseum tournaments. I was about to go speak to him, but then I got ambushed by these creatures. If you could do me this favor: may you speak with Hades?" she finished, mostly shocking Sora, Donald, and Goofy. Aseles got the feeling that Sora and the others have already been to this world before, and she guessed that they already knew of this person called Hades.

"Sure, no problem," Sora said with a firm smile.

"Thanks, I owe you," Meg replied, "it's through that door." She pointed to the blue-lined cave doors on one side of the cavern. She started to walk away as the group saw her beginning to walk up a staircase leading somewhere above, a pair of bright, white doors just at the top.

"Didn't we destroy Hades last time?" Sora asked after Meg had vanished out of view into the mystical, blinding light above, the doors closing behind her.

"I don't remember," Goofy stated, scratching his head.

"Well, through there then," Aseles pointed to the doors that Meg had indicated. The others nodded after a few moments of thought, and the whole group of four began to trek their way.

Along the deep and darkened pathway, Aseles wasn't surprised to find Heartless getting in the way, but how much in abundance they were in here. She sensed something wrong while fighting them....but she always grew weary so quickly, faster than the others anyways. She merely shook the thought out and continued to progress to follow the others as best as she could.

Finally walking up a steep, rocky path, the group of four ended up staring into an open area up ahead, connecting to their platform was a long trek of rock. It seemed to be the end of this certain location of the caverns, and Aseles saw a darkened entrance up ahead with a settled fog of white among the ground. She shuddered from just being in this room, but quickly collected herself when she noticed the end doors were opening, revealing a person in a black cloak. However, this person didn't think twice about running toward the group, leaving the dark doors completely wide open. He huffed greatly as Sora flashed out his keyblade, Donald his wand, Goofy his shield, and Aseles with her own keyblade.

"AHHH!" the person suddenly hollered, a male he sounded like as he suddenly....sprinted past the group, going into the opposite direction. The group dropped their weapons slowly, watching the Organization member disappear into a made, black portal, and then it wisped into the air, gone.

"...O....kaay..." Sora tilted his head to the right side.

"...Do we...just keep going?" Aseles asked.

"...Yeah...let's just go," Donald advised, letting Sora lead the way again. Upon entering the dark, rock doors at the end, there was a green illumination coming from the other end. The group walked a bit farther, and once inside, they looked among the large abyss over the rock platform they stood on. A steep hill of a slimmed rock rode over the rocky pillars it stood on, with a swirling green sea of souls swimming below. It was instant that Aseles felt sick to the stomach, and the rattle of her knees. Goofy and Donald were not behind as they too felt the need to leave the place, but Sora seemed to be the most determined, and began to walk toward the first step of the steep, zigzagging hill.

"C'mon guys, we're almost there," Sora encourage as Aseles blinked at his words, looked over the edge, and shivered in place. Unwillingly, the three began to follow behind Sora with whatever stamina they had left, trying to ignore the wailing, poor souls beneath the thousands of feet of space. Once at the top, Aseles swiftly ran forward, her hands on her knees, wanting to lay down to ensure she wasn't going to topple over the side. Donald's legs wriggled in anxiousness as Goofy's teeth chattered upon viewing what seemed to be the last doors the group would face. Aseles could hear a loud voice on the other side, muffled greatly, almost echoing; she knew they had arrived to their destination.

"Quietly," Sora headed forward, opening the left door. He walked forward as Donald was next to follow, and Aseles who was pulling Goofy along her side. There was a long staircase leading upward to a dim light, and Aseles gulped rather loudly, with Donald and Goofy joining in unison.

Sora began to walk up the stairs as quietly as he could, and the others followed him. When they reached the top, Aseles's eyes scavenged around the room, seeing it was pretty plenty in space, with a large stone table at the center. At the head of it stood a man, tall and lean as his back faced that of a large throne, chair. What instantly stood out was his cerulean skin, and the blue, flowing flames on his head. He was dressed in dark, black robes, and when he turned in profile, Aseles nearly whined in fright to see his black pupils resting on a yellow canvas for eyes; his teeth were point sharp like that of a shark's, and his lean, sharpened fingers gripped upon that of his long chin. Not to mention, his black lips stretched up enormously upward on his face, giving him the face of a deranged clown.

His eyes shot to the group, and Aseles instantly froze, almost falling over until Goofy kept her supported up on her feet. And Meg wanted to convince this guy? HOW?

"Hey Hades, we need to talk!" Sora jabbed a finger to the man, his eyes sharpened and mouth firm into a grim line. Obviously, he had way more confidence than Donald, Goofy, and Aseles, considering they quickly shifted to stand behind him.

"Well if it isn't Sora, and his pathetic friends. I *have* no time to talk to you guys," Hades waved them off, his mouth pouting in thought.

"It can't wait, it has to be now," Sora replied again in confidence.

"Do I have to burn you away?" Hades suddenly sprung about, and threw his arms down at his sides. His whole flesh of blue suddenly scorched a bright red, the air immensely hot and infuriated from his bright, bloodshot hair. Sora quickly spun his keyblade in hand, unresistant to charge as the rest of the group followed, swinging their weapons directly at Hades. However, the weapons only seemed to be phasing right through him, as if he were some sort of hologram. At the precise moments Aseles swung her keyblade, she could instantly feel this massive drain from her body, and now she could barely stand properly. Her knees buckled and her keyblade fell out of hand, her chest heaving greatly. She wasn't the only one as Donald was next to drop on his rear, sweat dropping down his forehead. At last Sora and Goofy stumbled backwards, also sweating from their heads as Sora remained upright on sore feet.

"Guys, I feel kind of funny," Sora said his eyes half way shut.

"Well that's because in the Underworld, evil always conquers! Duh!" Hades stuck out his tongue. "Well, it looks like you brought a new friend. Why don't I give her a *warm* welcome?" Hades threw his arm out beside him as it instantly turned into a bright red, flame. He was about to strike forward, but suddenly a man invaded the attack in quick speed, practically out of thin air.

Aseles observed the black, haired man, with a scar running down on the right side of his face, sealing his eye closed. His red coat with large sleeves flew across the air with precision as he struck his curving blade against Hades's advances. A faded, blue turtle piece surrounded his throat with leather, shoulder guard attached to it, typing around his chest. His left arm rested inside his coat, leaving his left sleeve lifeless by his side. A belt surrounded his waist as the final touch, along with his black boots.

"AHHH! What are you doing, I'm the one that brought you back to life!!! You live to serve *me*!" Hades screamed in fury. The rest watched in bewilderment, but quickly made advances to help Donald and Aseles up to their feet.

"I serve no one. This is *my* story, and you're not part of it," the man stated calmly. His voice was instantly rash and bold. Hades was completely outraged, and his flames were now exploding in the room, despite the opened window carving at the other side of the cold place.

"Let's go, we can't defeat him here," the man turned his head toward the four.

"But-" Sora began to argue.

"Sora!" Goofy suddenly reacted to grip his wrist, pulling him back.

"You're not going anywhere!" Hades screamed. He charged forward again, but the man suddenly took his sword in a fast spin, holding it over him with his right hand, gleaming from the flames of Hades's head. He blocked Hades's attack, sending him back as he toppled over the stone table.

However, something caught Aseles's attention as the group was now sprinting down the stairs, huffing in exhaustion. Hades had said that in the Underworld, evil always conquered...So was this man a bad guy? Why would he be helping them to escape?

The group of five was now running out of the doors, and Sora and the man were quick to slam them shut. Sora sighed heavily as Donald, Goofy and Aseles hunched over to catch their breaths, the man suddenly darting his eyes toward Sora.

“Leaving so soon?” Hades suddenly reappeared beside Sora’s side, his back resting against the rock wall by the door.

“Split!” Sora dodge rolled out of the way of a flaming orb, Hades growling in excitement as the group began to disperse among the platform.

“Down the hill!” the man called out as Donald was the first to lead, quaking his beak off as Goofy and Aseles ran right behind him. They were approaching the doors at the end, but before they could reach them, they blinked to suddenly find Hades was now blocking the only exit.

"Wrong-o," Hades wagged his finger, a sinister grin planted on his face.

“Out of the way!” Donald swung his wand in hand.

“The only one who gives orders is me!” Hades charged rapidly forward, his robes flying behind him. Donald and Goofy swiftly jumped out of the way, but Aseles was glued to the spot. She swung her keyblade forward in defense, but Hades was not too charitable on missing; Hades struck his flaming arm out, jabbing Aseles right across her stomach. Aseles screamed as she was sent flying backwards. Her back met the floor, her shirt burning off from the center.

SORA’S POV:

His eyes shot forward, and was completely off-guard off to see the God of the Underworld hit a target: Aseles. She flew across the floor, fumbling to a stop at her side with her hair all over her face. Hades cackled a laugh and began to walk toward her body.

“Stop!” Sora gritted his teeth, dashing forward. Unexpectedly the mysterious man clung onto the sleeve of his shirt, yanking him backwards. Sora flailed, but stopped once he caught the man’s grim expression, looking toward Hades and Aseles.

"Don't," the man replied. Sora couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Let Aseles get hurt?

“Why not?!” Sora demanded. He turned his head toward Hades, seeing him pick up Aseles by the collar of her shirt. Sora’s anger grew as he saw the burns on her stomach. She looked like a damaged rag doll.

"Well, it looks like your pathetic friend got cooked, wouldn’t you say?" Hades chuckled.

"Who...are... you calling...pathetic?" Aseles suddenly responded....but her stretched voice wasn't what Sora was expecting to hear. This voice was heavy, low, and almost toxic in the ears. Hades quickly released his grip on her, taking a step back as his eyes narrowed dangerously to her direction. Aseles’s limp body lay for a second on the ground, but then she began to float upwards, first her shoulders, and then her feet left the ground.

Aseles’s hair became loose, swimming around her face and suddenly tainted with red streaks until they fully consumed her whole hair, making it look like rabid flames. Her eyes shot wide open, her blue eyes now scorching reds. At the speed of a bullet, she charged toward Hades, hitting him in every strike she could pull off as Hades tried to block. It only lasted a few seconds, and Hades was now wriggling helplessly on the floor, coughing to the point of sharp agony. Aseles merely grinned.

"I'll get you yet!" Hades said with one last breath. A black aura swept over him, making him sink into the ground and disappear in a pool of darkness that sunk right into the ground. Sora looked up to face Aseles, Donald and Goofy doing the same. She was still floating in the air, the keyblade in her hand, ready.....

The man released Sora from his grip and began to advance toward her, with Aseles spinning her keyblade once and slashing forward. At the right moment, the man threw his free hand forward, clamping it around her forehead, particularly almost all of her face. Sora could only stare in shock as Aseles suddenly reverted back to her normal self, her hair falling around her shoulders again and her eyes dulling to their original blue. The burn across her stomach sizzled slightly, but the man was careful to catch her and pick her up, carrying her like a bride. She was breathing...but very shallowly.

He caught Sora's eyes first, "C'mon, let's go."

ASELES'S POV:

Her eyes fluttered open, only able to feel the massive pain instantly around her body. She exhaled sharply with her teeth grinding together and eliminating the chance of letting her lungs scream out. She began to detect voices, trying to clear up the buzz.

"Is she going to be okay?"

"Hey she's waking up!"

Aseles blinked rapidly past her eyelashes, finding a steady rhythm of feet moving below her...but she noticed she wasn't the one walking. She looked up past her bangs, finding that the man from before was the one carrying her. He smirked slightly to her, but Aseles could not attempt to say a thing to him, much less a word. The pain crept up her body, and she stayed as still as she could, shuddering uncomfortably and wincing.

The burn on her stomach, she could see it now, and it was not a pretty sight. She tilted her head, trying to look at it from a different angle, but it did not look good. As if Sora knew her thoughts, the group stopped walking and Aseles looked about to find them in the starting entrance of the Underworld, with the staircase somewhere in front of Aseles's view. Sora blocked it as he approached, and reached into his pocket to pull out a glass bottle, a potion. The green liquid was quickly inviting to Aseles, but as much as she wanted it, she was not sure if she would be able to drink it correctly.

"Can you drink it?" the man above her asked. She tilted her head back to look at him, but still didn't have the faintest strength to say anything.

"Can't move a muscle, huh?" the man smirked again. Sora inserted the potion into his pocket again, and the man held Aseles out from his chest, "I believe it is best if you take her." Aseles didn't have to turn her head to see Sora nod his head in agreement. The man went forward and slowly placed Aseles onto Sora's outstretched arms. He grabbed her steadily; his heartbeat relaxed her as she laid the side of her head against his chest, listening to it throbbing lively.

Sora looked up to the man, "Thanks for saving us back there, but who are you?"

"Auron," the man replied. Finally, a name.

"So...why did Hades bring you back?" Goofy asked.

"I've done things that I'm not so proud of...Hades brought me back to defeat the man named Hercules," Auron finished.

"That reminds us, we've got to find Hercules," Donald quickly stated.

"But what 'bout Hades?" Goofy asked worriedly.

"We didn't get a chance to talk to him, but we'll figure out another way," Sora answered, "Thanks Auron, we better get going." Sora began to lead the way to the bottom of the staircase yards away with Donald and Goofy following right behind him. After a couple of steps up, Sora stopped in his pace and turned, Aseles still cradled in his arms.

"Why aren't you coming, Auron?" Sora called out.

"Don't worry about me," Auron answered. Sora blinked but turned again as he began to walk up the stairs again, shielding Aseles from Auron's view as he did.

Was Auron really a bad guy? No, he couldn't be. He saved them from a lunatic devil just a couple of....well, she wasn't sure how long she was knocked out for, but all the same Aseles figured that Auron was not such a bad person if he had betrayed the one who had brought him back to life.

Sora trekked back a little down as he began to follow Donald and Goofy who had taken the lead, Sora careful not to walk too quickly to make Aseles uncomfortable. Luckily he was taking his time, because it did hurt every time Sora walked up each step, making her cringe from every sudden jerk of his arms.

As the stairs continued to be conquered, the two had finally reached the top step of the stairs with Donald and Goofy holding the large doors open from their sides. Instantly, Aseles felt the surge of warmth run through her body; the sunlight kissed along her tan skin, and her head frizzled in joy from the wonderful caressing of the slight breeze. She looked up to the bright, blue sky, the thin clouds hovering slowly across it in peace. At the far end of the area, there was a large building awaiting.

The building's front was decorated very Romanesque, the sides of it supported by intricate, designed columns with two gladiator warriors shining gold at the end, posing with their drawn swords that marked an "X" against each other, above the entrance. Stone steps led to the main, double-door entrance of the building with a couple of huge torches flaming brightly across the arena.

Sora turned his attention toward the building and began to lead Donald and Goofy. It was obvious they were going to walk into it, with Donald and Goofy hurrying forward and opening the doors for him. Every step Sora took made Aseles cringe and writhe in pain, but she bit onto her tongue, exhaling deeply once he made it to the top. She didn't have the slightest idea on why he would want to go in here...unless there was a first-aid nearby.

The room was rather refreshing from the hot weather outside, but more formidable to the skin than the Underworld. Its walls were beautifully decorated in harvest gold; the sides open with a couple of golden-rimmed bowls holding flames, able to light up room and its crevices completely.

Meg turned toward the group, facing away from the man she was talking. Aseles looked past her to see the man wearing polyester, light-brown tunic that was sleeveless and reached to his knees. It held a blue cape tied behind as it rested around his broad shoulders. At his feet he wore brown sandals, with his wrists wearing brown wristbands, and wrapped around his waist was a belt that held a gold medallion with a lightning symbol engraved on it. He had orange hair that was held with a red headband and turquoise, bright eyes. He was completely muscled and buff by his appearance, and Aseles took guess that this was Wonder Boy....er...Hercules.

He stood up from the cube boulder he was sitting on, turning his attention to the group, smiling instantly, "Sora, Donald, and Goofy! I'm glad to see you!" His eyes then looked down toward Aseles, a worried expression taking possession of his features, "Oh. What happened to you?"

"She got burnt, and it looks pretty bad," Sora explained. Meg quickly walked over to the man's side, looking down at Aseles with a horrid face. She shook it off before Hercules could turn around and see it. Great, now all eyes were on her. Aseles really wasn't the one to like the center of attention.

"We've got to get her some help," the man responded.

"She's too weak to drink a potion," Donald said.

"She must be badly injured if she can't do that," Meg said, concerned.

As carefully as he could, Sora carried Aseles forward, placing her in Hercules's arms. Hercules was indeed strong in stature, and picked up Aseles easily and much higher than Sora was before. She rested easily in his arms like an infant. Sora's gloved hand reached into his pocket as he pulled out the same potion again from before, the green contents inside swirling and glowing.

Hercules nodded as Sora pulled off the cork, "Okay, the easiest way to do this is if you give it mouth-to-mouth."

Aseles's eyes shot open wide, as big as dinner plates as she swiftly shot up in Hercules's arms, "NO WAY!" Sora's mouth flew open in shock, his hands almost dropping the potion to the floor. Everyone darted their eyes to Aseles in surprise, but as the energy had come, it was gone and she flopped back into Hercules's grip, moaning painfully.

"Alright, alright! It was just a suggestion," Hercules chuckled. Sora shook his bewildered expression off and headed toward Aseles, tipping the potion over her dry lips. Aseles opened her mouth slowly, feeling the green liquid glide down from the opening and over her tongue and down her throat. After a few moments, she swallowed the final gulp of the bottle, and began to feel better.

Hercules placed Aseles on her feet as she looked down at her midsection, seeing the degree burns disappear from view with her clothes still damaged, unfortunately. Miraculously, she felt more energetic, and much more reflexive and ready. Still staggering, she gathered her balance correctly.

"Try to walk," Goofy suggested. Aseles placed her left foot first, Sora standing by and ready to catch her if she fell. She took a couple of steps forward, and found herself steady as stone.

"Well, it looks like you've recovered," Hercules smiled.

"Just sore...." Aseles grunted, leaning against the boulder Hercules was sitting on moments ago.

"You're going to need some rest then," Donald said.

"Donald's right," Sora nodded.

"It shouldn't take long as far as we can tell," Meg nodded as well.

"Well, I have to leave for the moment. I have a competition next," Hercules said next, his eyes dropping several degrees.

"No, you can't go, you're too tired," Meg quickly snatched his arm, tugging it roughly.

"I can't let my fans down," Hercules sighed. "But, not to worry! I'll be back in a jiffy!" Hercules then lifted his arm and tried to flex, but to no avail. He turned back toward the five and faked a smile, leaving without another word. He disappeared behind the doors at the far end of the room.

"I'm really sorry that you're injured because of me," Meg turned toward Aseles with her hands together in front of her.

"I'm....good as new, see?" Aseles smiled nervously, wincing. Meg frowned.

"But, we did try to talk to him," Goofy replied.

"What happened?" Meg persisted.

"He wouldn't listen," Sora stated.

"Maybe there's another way..." Donald suggested.

"But what?" Sora gestured with an open hand. "That God of the Underworld is thicker than nails. Not to mention....what happened...you know?" Sora whispered the last part.

"Maybe he forgot all about it?" Goofy scratched his nose. Donald and Sora stared at him while Meg began to try to fix Aseles's shirt.

#### AT HADES' HIDEOUT:

"I'm going to get that little brat if it's the last thing I do," the God of the Underworld stated coldly. He turned to the huge dog named Pete who stood beside him in fright.

This Pete was quite a funny character to look at. He was wide for his stature and carried some belly flop in front of him. But not even the armor Pete wore could intimidate, much less protect him of Hades's wrath. The man was clearly red in the face, the flames scorching and savagely whipping on his head.

"Well, as it figures, she's with that boy with the keyblade," Pete said.

"She has a keyblade as well," Hades said with a hand gesture. Pete held a shocked face, new to this information as Hades continued, "...and I would just love to see both of them being crushed in that Underworld Tournament."

"Well, can't you open it?" Pete asked.

"Wrong-o. Big golden, ol' mighty sealed it. Who knows what kind of materials he used to do that," Hades huffed angrily, cracking his knuckles.

"Well, why don't you use Sora's keyblade, or the girl's? Those keyblades can open up anything," Pete nodded as he crossed his arms.

As if the whole world had gone into chaos, Hades grinned, "It's perfect! That's just what I'll do! But, of course, I just need one more ingredient to package the whole thing together..." Pete backed away; terrified of the way Hades had set his plan, plus the way he was smiling.

Hades held out his hand, casting a small figure of Meg before him, "This calls for a woman's touch..."

#### BACK AT THE COLISEUM:

Aseles sat next to the right gladiator outside the doors of the Coliseum, sighing with her elbows resting on her knees with her chin in her palms. She looked at down at her tattered shirt, grimacing at the burnt marks. Too bad she didn't have an extra shirt with her.

Aseles picked up her head to see Sora arriving from the side of the large area, with something bundled in his hands. Aseles slowly stood as Sora smiled to her, now standing in front of her. He pushed his hands forward, handing Aseles something dark navy. Aseles blinked, but took the bundle in her hands, and realized it was folded. She unfolded the shirt that she held, and blushed immediately. She looked at Sora's chest instantly, but saw that he wore his own shirt.



"An extra of mine," Sora replied.

Aseles gulped roughly, the red across her cheeks, "Um....thank you. Do you mind if..." Sora blinked, but he quickly nodded and turned, his back facing her. He placed his hands behind his head, whistling. Aseles took a quick look around, but found no one as she dove behind a pillar, and removed her shirt hurriedly. She threw Sora's extra shirt on, pulling it down firmly in place. She unbuckled her pants and began to tuck the bottom of the shirt inside. She buttoned up her pants again, gently pulling out some of the fabric of the shirt to fold over her hips.

Aseles came back out of the shadow of the pillars, brushing down her bare arms and shoulders, seeing that the shirt was completely sleeveless. She looked up, blushing mad to see Sora smiling widely at her, tilting his head.

"Nice shirt, I must say," he chuckled.

"Um....thank you...." Aseles replied again, clearing her throat. She had torn off a long piece of her burnt shirt, and began to make a high ponytail of her hair. She gave it a secure knot, feeling satisfied of the new change of top.

"Sora...I need to ask you," Aseles began.

"Hmm, what is it?" Sora tilted his head, crossing his arms.

"...What happened? I mean...I don't remember....this," Aseles held up the rest of her burnt shirt, looking at Sora.

Sora's eyes dropped, but when they lifted, they held a stern expression, "...Aseles....I don't know how to describe to you what happened."

Aseles frowned, "...Can you try? The fact that I don't remember any of it....is alarming to me."

Sora scratched his head, sighing deeply, "From what we saw, Hades charged you down. After...you charged after him, and you weren't...yourself." Aseles frowned further, looking down at her shirt, tugging at it strongly in oppression. What was happening to her?

Sora walked a step forward, and placed a hand on her shoulder, "Don't worry about it. Whatever it was, it saved you, and us." Aseles perked her head up, but nodded slowly. However, Aseles did not accept this; why was she going to accept something that she had no control over? It was unrealistic, even to her.

"Did you think of any ways to talk to Hades?" Aseles decided to ask.

"No not yet," Sora looked at the floor, kicking a rock as he held onto his head.

"We'll think of something, somehow..." Aseles replied, tossing her burnt shirt into the pit of a nearby torch. She looked to see her shirt fade away in black ash. It was as if...she were burning her past, burning away the person she once was. Aseles was now wound up in something she could not foretell, and as crazy as it was, it was best to keep moving forward. What could she gain if she kept going back to the past, only to achieve nothing; nothing was left for her.

Just then, Aseles and Sora heard the wooden doors at the entrance of the building open, seeing it was Hercules. It looked as if he barely had enough energy inside of him to take another step. Three matches nonstop? It had to be killer....who knew what kind of opponents he faced in there.

"Hey, Herc," Sora quickly stopped in front of him as Aseles stood beside him.

Hercules jumped, surprised, "Oh! Hey Sora, Aseles."

"Are you all right?" Aseles asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Hercules said again with a fake, cheerful tone. Not again.

"Hey, Hercules, can I ask you something?" Aseles replied. He nodded, "Is there a way to fight in the Underworld?"

"Yeah, why?" Hercules asked again.

"What's the catch?"

"Hmm.... There is one way I know, and that's using the Olympus Stone," Hercules thought out loud.

"Well, can we use it?" Sora encouraged.

"Well, it's going to be tough to get it, but sure. I don't see why not," Hercules finished with a small smile, "Why do you need it?"

"Well er....you see--"

"The Heartless down there...just to diminish their numbers so they don't reach up here," Aseles cut in.

Sora quickly nodded, "Yeah, that's it."

"Oh, alright, then no problem, I'll get it for you," Hercules smiled, his stiffness suddenly gone for that brief moment.

Sora began to head toward the Underworld entrance as Aseles followed right behind. Racing to the bottom of the stairs, Donald and Goofy waited up ahead.

"Hey, guess what? We found a way!" Sora said excitedly, "To fight in the Underworld and teach Hades a lesson."

"What is it?" Goofy asked.

"There's this Olympus Stone that we can use to fight in the Underworld, and Hercules went to go get it for us," Sora nodded.

"Hey, where's Meg?" Aseles asked, looking about. She was sure Meg had done with both Donald and Goofy.

"We don't know, we were just looking for her," Donald crossed his arms as he tapped his foot impatiently.

"Well, well, well, you're looking for a friend?" Hades' voice suddenly boomed against the rock ceiling. The four looked around swiftly, unable to identify where the voice was coming from specifically. It was a chilling sensation that didn't fit well to Aseles's prediction of Meg's whereabouts.

"Come out, Hades!" Sora yelled in anger.

"No-can-do chump! Seems like you're having a bit of a difficulty to find some damsel in distress!!" Hades laughed.

"Oh no you don't!" Donald yelled, but Hades's voice did not respond back.

"Oh no! He's got Meg!" Goofy said.

"Do we.....go look for her?" Aseles asked.

"We need to tell Hercules. We need that stone," Sora immediately ran toward the stairs as the rest followed.

MOMENTS LATER:

After a few gruesome, slow minutes, Hercules finally headed out of the entrance from the match platform. He appeared much more tired than before, and his eyes brightened when he caught sight of all four waiting in the Lobby.

"Hey guys, what's going on?" Hercules faked a smile again.

"Hades has Meg!" they all stated in unison with wide eyes.

"What!? This can't be!" Hercules' hands gripped his head as he staggered on his feet.

"Do you have the stone?" Sora asked.

Hercules' eyes shot upward as he reached into his pocket, holding something solid in his muscled hand, "Here!" He tossed it toward Sora as he quickly caught it. The moment he did, a bright light engulfed each individual of the group of four. After a few seconds, it dimmed as the stone in Sora's hand radiated in bright yellow.

"Let's go!" Donald commanded. The group began to quickly head toward the doors out of the Lobby, Sora stuffing the stone in his pocket. Suddenly, Sora stopped, looking back at Hercules who stood motionless from his spot.

"Aren't you coming?" Sora asked impatiently, looking at him as he stood in the Lobby.

"I can't.....I have a match. But, please, go! Get her safe here, and quickly!" he responded. The rest looked at Sora for orders, and then saw him nod in agreement. Sora led the way through the wooden doors, the four now practically flying toward the doors of the Underworld, feeling the rays of sunlight gone from touch. Aseles shivered, and almost froze in her tracks as the group arrived at the bottom of the white stairs.

This time, they all headed through the green-lined cave double-doors on the opposite side. After a few sprints, the group arrived in the entrance to a fogged maze, but entered with much determination nonetheless. However, a maze being a maze, the four were rummaging around like mice, trying to figure out where the end of the maze exactly was, several times ending up at the entrance of the maze yet again and having to double back. Fortunately, after all the arguing about which way to go and which path was already taken, the four had come up with one path to follow and amazingly made it through.

Quickly as they could, they began to run toward the bottom of a small cliff, jagged rocks leading upward like a pair of stairs toward the foggy ceiling upstairs. And, again, Heartless began to throw themselves forward, but they were no match for the fairness the four had received from the Olympus Stone and were quickly eliminated from the path. Defeating them just like the last bunch, the four continued on their mission to save Meg as quick as possible, unsure how she was captured in the first place.

Arriving at the top of the cliff, a steep hill then led toward a dark entrance. Everyone couldn't help but give a glance to each other, agreeing to continue on without any hesitation. They all walked side by side, weapons drawn and ready to strike in hand.

Finally arriving at the other side of the dark tunnel, Aseles looked around the vacant, huge room that only occupied with a couple of poles, blue flames burning wildly on their torches. It didn't surprise her that this floor also was covered in a thin fog that covered her ankles and down, but this time, this one had a chilling feeling that sped all the way up to her spine and neck. What was this place? It was practically dead dark without the flames.

At the center of the area laid a huge, dark boulder with something carved in the middle of it that was illumined in various colors. The four all neared closer in caution, staring intently at the flowing colors. Suddenly, the carved lines radiated at the same time, and at the moment Aseles could distinctively point out a figure embedded inside the stone. She was curled up as if cold.

"Meg!" Donald and Sora raced forward as Aseles ran her hands across the carved lines. How the heck did she get in a rock??

"How do we set her free?" Sora asked. The four began to circle around the boulder questionably, searching for something out of the ordinary. However, Aseles again appeared in front of Meg again with no hint of her freedom.

"You think this will help?" Goofy asked. Donald turned his head to see Goofy pointed next to one of lit poles. The duck shook his head, tapping his foot as he smacked his forehead.

As Aseles continued to maneuver around the boulder, she began to suspect that...perhaps this was too easy to solve. So far, the group had encountered nothing but Heartless on the way over here, and some lost brain cells to get out of the maze, but as far as she could tell, nothing was really a challenge. And as they ventured inside the cave, they did not encounter Hades anywhere. If he had kidnapped her, and wanted her kidnapped, surely he would've popped out at least once to state that fact. He was definitely up to something, and had Meg intertwined with his plan. Something else was part of this diabolical plan to kidnap Meg.

At that minute, a golden sparkling keyhole suddenly appeared below of Meg's carved feet. Aseles took a couple of steps back, staring at it as Sora, Donald and Goofy noticed it a couple of seconds later.

Sora held out his keyblade, pointing it to the keyhole. Aseles stared at it, but waited as the beam of light radiated out, and began to unlock the seal on Meg. Before any of them could make another move, the boulder began to glow brightly, blinding them all and lighting up the area in a quick blaze of light. After a few moments, Aseles opened her eyes to find a gap at where the boulder once stood.

"Let's go save, Meg," Sora boldly jumped into the glowing, draining gap as Donald and Goofy jumped right behind, leaving Aseles alone in the cold room. She narrowed her eyes and took one last look around before following right behind. At last, she felt herself on the ground and opened her eyes to see find herself in a blinding, white cave. Lying at the end of the room was Meg.

"Meg!" the four ran to her aid, Sora approaching her first and helping her stand up. She fluttered her eyes opened, gripping her head in confusion.

"What...happened?" she asked.

"Well, well, well! If it isn't the twerps," a voice shouted from behind. Aseles turned as her eyes looked upon a huge figure at the far end of the room, a big dog of some sort.

"Pete!" Donald shouted with his temper boiling. Sora, Donald and Goofy stood readily in front of Meg and Aseles, weapons drawn out to this mysterious character named Pete.

"Pete?" Aseles whispered.

"And you guys can't do anything about it! Because in the Underworld, evil always prevails!" Pete laughed out loud. Yeah, by the sound of his hearty laughter, he was a bad guy. Shocker.

"Yeah, right!" Sora charged forward and swung his keyblade at Pete, making it spin rapidly in the air. It struck Pete right on the abdomen, and sent him flying to hit the wall. Pete shook his head in disbelief, standing up as he gave a worried expression, but it quickly evolved into anger and irritation.

"Attack!" Pete shouted, pointing a chubby finger toward the lot. Heartlesses appeared from the forming black gaps in the air, surrounding the others in haste with their bat wings flapping, "Get that woman!" Pete commanded as he referred to Meg. The Heartless charged after Meg as Sora, Donald and Goofy quickly dealt with them, Aseles keeping tabs on Meg. Though, no matter how many they smacked, killed, or struck, more would just replace the ones before. To make matters worse, Pete was allowing himself to join the party. Worst part was, he was preventing all of them from leaving with Aseles close to and grabbing onto Meg. He seemed like Pete was buying time.

Sora quickly grabbed Meg's hand, making a run for the exit as the rest followed, but Pete guarded the exit with bombs and fists in hand. Changing tactics, Donald, Goofy and Aseles then copied what Sora had done, but to no prevail even with more force in the way.

The battle raged on, and it was becoming tiring to say the least, and Aseles's temper was reaching to its peak. With much irritation, she charged forward to Pete, ready to strike her keyblade at him. Suddenly, he dodged amazingly in sheer luck. He laughed as he sent his large fingers forward, gripping her throat in his grasp. She gasped in horror, swinging her body around to loosen his grip. Before she could call for help, it gave her...a stupid idea.

"Go! Run for it!" she screamed as loud as she could to the others. They would have the chance to escape.

"No! We won't leave you!" Sora yelled. UGH! Unfortunately, she had to face the facts they weren't going to go, not without her. She darted her squinting eyes to Pete. His eyes narrowed in total vengeance, his grip becoming slowly tighter and firm. The others tried to come to the rescue, but failed with Heartless in their way. All Aseles could hear was someone calling out her name over and over again....

"Aw, Sora has a little girlfriend!" Pete teased. Aseles trembled...in anger, struggling greatly, but only to feel the quaking of her lungs beginning to give into nothing. Her eyes were becoming heavy.

"Mind if I cut in?" Aseles gasped in the air when Pete had let go, and he was swiftly knocked backwards. Aseles picked up her head, seeing Hercules had entered the ring now, helping Aseles to her feet. Aseles took in deep breaths, but thanked Hercules greatly for his help. Instantly the number of Heartless diminished at Hercules's arrival.

The neighing of a horse boomed into view, a white horse with eagle wings approaching the group. Hercules hurried forward as Aseles followed behind him, seeing him carry Meg and place him onto the horse with the blue mane.

"Take Meg, Pegasus!" Hercules replied. The horse immediately took off toward the exit of the cave at the end, with Meg screaming as she clung onto the horse's neck.

"You know I hate heiiiiights!" Meg called out, but Hercules turned his attention now to Pete who recovered, and grew another furious look to the group. He called out more Heartless, but they were quickly defeated in a couple of fast swings. Suddenly, the floor rumbled greatly and above their heads: the cave: the cave was crumbling to its last capacity.

"C'mon!" Hercules ran forward as the rest followed with Pete gone in a wisp of darkness.

"Aseles! Hurry up!" Donald yelled out. Once again Aseles was the last one running at the end as she huffed greatly, panting as she felt the falling boulders tumble behind her back. She shot her eyes back, but regretted seeing the whole cave collapsing right behind her. She sprinted faster as she threw herself forward, yanked up swiftly by Hercules's grip that she was almost thrown into the air.

Aseles landed roughly on her feet, stumbling as she crashed into Donald, the two toppling to the ground.

"Ow..." Donald groaned.

"Sorry," Aseles replied, quickly standing up and helping the duck up. She looked about, seeing they were back in the gloomy, the entrance of the cave behind her fully collapsed in and blocked. If she had missed Hercules's hand just by a few feet....she shuddered at the thought.

"Are you all right?" Goofy came beside.

"Yeah, perfect," Aseles replied, shaking her mind to wake.

"That was a close call! C'mon, let's go and find Meg in the Coliseum," Hercules stated. Everyone looked at one another for reassurance, nodding as they all began to head toward the exit of the cave.

As they did, Sora suddenly came in front of Aseles, and he gripped onto her shoulders. Aseles blinked rapidly, looking directly at him, perplexed of his sudden approach.

"Sora?" she asked, trying to point to the three who were already taking the lead up ahead.

He whispered gently, "Don't ever do that again....ever." Aseles stayed immobile, unsure how to respond to his statement. "If something were to happen to you...." he continued. Aseles could only guess his safety concerns were his main priority...but...

Aseles could feel her cheeks burn brightly, but cleared her throat, "Alright. I'll be more careful next time." She could feel her head spin wildly around like a typhoon, this odd feeling scolding the pit of her stomach again. What was this odd connection?

Sora looked at her fully with those sky orbs of his, but began to follow the others as Aseles followed closely behind. She pushed her hands in her pockets, gathering a normal pace behind the others with Sora who laced his fingers together behind his head. The walking steps were silent, but the booming of Aseles's questions rampaged in her head.

Maybe...just maybe, something was there...

LATER:

Finally they made it to the top steps of the longing staircase, seeing the white doors just up ahead. Aseles expected to be greeted with a warm welcome of Meg and Pegasus, but what she found was something far from it; laying in the hot sun was the ruins of the Coliseum with the entrance completely collapsed with only the pillars at the very sides intact. The statues that once stood before were now thrown and hacked into pieces all over the area, one in particular cut in half, only

leaving the feet in their original place. Beyond the building Aseles could see the destroyed and battered stands of the audience.

"Looks like you didn't defeat the Hydra completely, kid..." Hades voice rang with a laugh.

"What have I done?" Hercules fell to his knees, his muscled hands gripping his hair in a mess.

"It's not your fault, Hercules," Meg quickly appeared from the broken column at the left hand side, the horse named Pegasus right beside her. She kneeled beside Hercules and placed her arm around his neck.

"It is....it always will be. I don't deserve to be a hero..." Hercules stated, ashamed. Suddenly the ground rumbled in fury as everyone but Hercules shot their heads up, locking onto the view of a grotesque monster making its way over. It was absolutely horrifying to look at, its purple flesh shining in the sun's rays. Along with it came black stripes across its back and the back of its enormously long neck with a huge, spiky mane. It grinned savagely, baring its amazingly sharp jaws and huge eyes. It carried a stubby and short body, along with short legs, but intensely sharp claws.

"Oh no, the Hyrda," Meg gasped. The monster let out a mighty roar as Meg and Pegasus quickly helped Hercules to get up, hurrying out of the way as the rest pulled out their weapons. The monster shot its eyes toward the escaping friends, striking forward in less than a second.

Sora was the first to react and stood between the group and the hideous beast. The monster withdrew back, recoiling with its neck bare. Sora charged the next second, swinging his keyblade across into the air. It spun to its target as Aseles clamped her mouth shut, seeing the Hydra's neck completely cut off clean from its shoulders. Green goo spilled all over its entire body, Sora's keyblade spinning back like a boomerang and back into his hand, with Donald cringing from the sight. The lifeless head landed right in front of Donald and Aseles, both groaning at the smell of it. Goofy tilted his head at it, wriggling his nose in disgust.

Sora next placed his keyblade over his shoulder, smirking slightly, "Well, that was eas- OH YUCK." Sora quickly removed his keyblade from his shoulder, flicking off the goo that had wrapped around its neck and head.

"....No way," Aseles's mouth dropped as she turned to look at the wriggling body that lay on the ground.

"Maybe it's just a reflex," Donald began. The body suddenly stood on its feet as it then dug its stump neck against the ground in a strong push. The ground rumbled, and instantly three, monstrous head popped out from the ground, surrounding the group of four.

"Still think it's a reflex?!" Aseles shouted. She quickly blocked the oncoming head ot her direction, making it recoil back. Sora began to hack away at his own as Donald and Goofy settled with the one in the center.

Everything turned into frenzy as Aseles looked around, seeing Sora dodge the oncoming attacks pretty well, causing major damage to his head. Goofy kept blocking the attacks to protect Donald as he threw continuous, powerful spells. Aseles blocked and attacked her own efficiently, but began to slow down from its quick reflexes.

Aseles jumped to the side as the head spun forward, piercing past her shoulder. She winced and quickly charged; kicking the head aside and cutting off the neck before the Hydra head could recover back with another attack. The head dropped dead by her feet, unmovable with that reek once again. She looked back toward the others, seeing the two beheaded heads on the ground.

"You've got to be kidding," Donald stated. Sora, Donald and Aseles turned to his gaze, and saw the short, stump body moving again, seeing it pull its neck off the ground. The incision on its shoulders suddenly began to thicken with a webby-substance with huge lumps thudding and rubbing against it. The group's faces turned into horror and disgust, seeing not one, or two, but six heads emerge from the wound. Aseles's mouth dropped from the horrible sight.

"Just a reflex..." Sora growled and ran forward.

"SORA!" Meg suddenly called out. Aseles turned, seeing Pegasus suddenly sprinting from hiding, running past and gliding along the floor. Sora charged forward, quickly mounting upon Pegasus, the Hydra's heads quickly leaving Donald, Goofy and Aseles and snapping their jaws toward Sora.

"He's distracting them! Now's our chance!" Donald replied. Aseles and Goofy nodded as they ran forward, striking against the body. Two heads shot downward, but the mage, guard and wielder did not hesitate to retort back in frustration.

Aseles shot her keyblade forward, but suddenly found it snapped and locked inside a pair of jaws. She struggled to pull it back, grunting as the head persisted forward, snapping and almost swallowing her keyblade.

Aseles growled, "Fire!" A blaze of fire engulfed around her, burning the mouth and tongue of the head in front of her. It yelped in pain, drawing back as Aseles staggered onto her feet, back safely on the floor. The other heads immediately turned their attention to her, completely ignoring Sora's coming attacks. Two charged as Goofy, yet again, blocked them, Donald getting clear shots on his spells.

A set of jaws charge, passing the defenses as it caught Aseles's keyblade in between its upper and lower jaw. It suddenly lifted Aseles upward from the ground, her hands tightly gripping the handle and neck of her keyblade. She kicked and shrieked as the air rushed hurriedly around her body, her hair flapping madly among her face. Pretty much thrown around like a rag doll, Aseles noticed another set of jaws heading right towards her. At the last second, Pegasus came swiftly in front, Sora cutting the head off from its neck. All the heads were paralyzed suddenly at the moment as Aseles began to slide and roll down several of the huddled necks, falling to the ground with a thump. Goofy hurried over to her side, helping her up.

"Thanks Goofy," Aseles whined, holding onto her pounding chest. Both of them turned to Donald, helping him up after being knocked down to the ground by a head.

"HEY SORA, OVER HERE, JUMP ON ITS BACK!" a voice yelled from afar. Aseles picked up her head to see a...goat-man? This satyr had orange hair that rimmed around his bald spot with an orange goatee around his plump face. He kept pointing to the back of the Hydra, though hiding behind some pillars.

"Phil!" Donald and Goofy yelled with happy faces.

"Right!" Sora yelled back. He hopped off of Pegasus and landed directly on the Hydra's back. Sora, with no hesitation, drew his keyblade around, striking and hitting the Hydra with everything he had, spinning his keyblade overhead then across at his sides. The Hydra's heads began to recoil around as the three below began to pin them down to the ground, paralyzing them as Sora continued with his powerful strikes. Sora quickly jumped off the Hydra, landing in front of the three who continued to block off the recoiling heads once again.

"Time to finish this!" Sora swung his empty hand, another keyblade in hand. His red clothes made him appear like flames as he shot forward in lightning speed, cutting off all of the heads with a



quick strike, leaving Aseles astounded from that reckless maneuver. All six heads fell forward and disintegrated, only leaving the body lifeless, for real this time.

Meg dragged Hercules out of hiding as the one named Phil jumped down from the torn down wall he had hoisted himself over, avoiding all the rummage of broken stone. The rest sighed in relief, calling their weapons away. Aseles rubbed her shoulders, unbelieving of the soreness she was already feeling. This would take some getting used to.

"Well done, champ!" Phil said.

"Phil!" Sora, Donald, and Goofy said again, charging to Phil and hugging him. Aseles instead looked over to the entrance that led to the Underworld, walking toward it to see Hercules was seated there, along with Meg who stood by Pegasus's side, checking if he had any wounds on him.

Aseles sat next to Hercules in the cool shade, looking over to Hercules's gloomy face, looking ashamed. "You okay?" she asked him.

"I'm no hero..." he placed his hands on his face.

"You're a hero to me, and everyone else around here knows that too," Aseles replied softly, trying to at least bring his spirits back up. He said nothing but sighed. "Is there a way I can help you?" With no energy whatsoever, he shook his head. Aseles's small smile disappeared as she stared at him in bewilderment, unbelieving that a man such as himself could not consider himself as a hero, despite all that he had done today.

Suddenly a blinding light hovered above the others, showing the Olympus Stone appear out of Sora's pocket. It glowed brightly as the light around it dimmed, now floating in midair in front of Sora. Aseles stood to look over to see Sora draw out his keyblade, pointing it toward the stone. It glowed even more and it was spun wildly around, the keyblade shooting a beam toward it. Then the sound of something locking echoed in the air.

"Looks like our time is up here," Sora said, catching the stone in his hands his keyblade gone. He handed the stone to Meg who held it gently in her hands.

"Will you come back?" she asked.

"Of course," Donald and Goofy said.

"All right, let's go. Sorry we have to leave Phil," Sora turned to his short friend.

"It's alright," Phil said. Hercules slowly stood up as he began to walk past Aseles, passing by Sora and the gang, and heading toward the wreckage of the building. His shoulders slumped on his back, with Sora looking to him with a frown.

"Take care of Herc," Sora replied, looking to Meg, Pegasus and Phil.

"We will," Meg nodded once.

"Champ just needs some training," Phil replied. "And...who is this?" he raised a brow to Aseles's direction.

"Oh, meet Aseles," Goofy smiled widely. "She's traveling with us."

"Soon enough you'll be getting my training too," Phil placed his hands on his wide hips.

"Training?" Aseles raised a brow.

"Another time. You best be off," Phil waved a hand to her direction.

"You guys ready to go?" Sora asked. The three companions nodded, and the four began to head toward the white doors of the Underworld, where their gummi ship awaited.

FFW:

The gummi ship was now following a new route once more as Aseles looked out toward the stars, mainly her mind wrapped around what had happened with Hades.

"Where are we going?" Sora asked.

"We're going to where we live," Goofy said.

"Where do you guys live?" Aseles perked her head up, curious.

"Disney Castle," Donald said, steering the gummi ship.

"This is going to be so awesome! I've never been to where you guys live before!" Sora said excitedly. Aseles blinked, surprised of Sora's sudden eager child within, but smiled at the sight.

"We've got a long way to go so we better get some shut eye," Donald yawned. Aseles looked away, but couldn't stop the yawn from escaping her lips either, sulking back into her chair with her arms resting on the side of the chair. She laid her head against her crossed arms, sighing deeply.

Though the slumber did not arrive, and instead she looked at the stars, wondering, hoping for a sign that...this was not real. But the more they traveled, the more she was with them, the insanity of protecting these worlds from harmful events was growing thicker and bolder.

With another exhale, Aseles began to close her eyes, feeling her sore body take in the sleep it required. Her nose buried into the folds of her shirt around her neck, smelling it gently, and blushing at Sora's musk.

## A New Power

Aseles woke up gradually, feeling the brimming energy within her stiff bones. When she opened her eyes, she looked down upon herself, surprised that she...was still alive, despite being burnt by Hades, choked by Pete, and almost snacked on by the Hydra; Aseles must have the luckiest luck there ever was.

She sat up straighter, looking around the pit to see that she was the only one awake at the moment, the other three snoozing off. Her eyes lazily turned to the controls, leisurely standing and stretching. She felt the pops in her shoulders, making her groan from the feeling. She looked through the huge window in front, the stars gleaming and whizzing by as the ship thrived among its open road.

"How did I even get here?" she whispered in irritation, shaking her head. She turned back to look at the others, though her eyes fell upon the defenseless Sora, seeing him content in his slumber. The corner of his mouth twitched, and Aseles quickly looked away, wanting to slap herself across the face. Surely...she wasn't-NO, how could she? It was beyond comprehension to even think of the thought, but what was this ancient look that she would always be giving him? As if.....she had known him all along.

Aseles looked over to see Goofy fumbling, seeing him wake up with sluggish eyes. Aseles smiled to his direction, his eyes looming over, and spotting Aseles, "Good mornin'," Goofy yawned out.

"Good morning," Aseles replied. Donald was next to wake up, stretching his arms out as he shut his eyes from the motion. He smacked his lips, and began to take control of the ship immediately. Aseles quirked her mouth to one side, looking at the duck; was Donald still ticked off she was here?

In the distance of the window, Aseles spotted something into view, and there was no doubt in her mind that it was Disney Castle. As the ship approached, it began to penetrate through the world's atmosphere, the clouds passing by and fogging up the window.

"Hold on, Aseles," Donald stated firmly, grabbing the ship's steering wheel tightly. Aseles hurried to her seat, strapping on her belt as Goofy did the same. She turned back to Donald, seeing him pull the steering wheel backwards against his chest, causing the ship to decrease in speed. In front of the window, she viewed the gummi ship entering a metal, opening entrance.

The ship rumbled greatly, vibrating her body as it did its best to stay glued to the chair. Next came a loud boom, and the ship stooped abruptly, causing her upper body to mount practically over and out of the belt. Everything was hidden in darkness, nothing unclear as Aseles tried to adjust her sight in the darkness.

Next, Aseles felt something grip the gummi ship behind, pushing it gently forward. After a few moments, there was light once again, and the gummi ship was entering some kind of workshop. Every aspect of the area was covered in buttons, levers, bright screens, and scanners, all measuring conditions of the ship. Aseles simply stared in awe, her eyes targeting across the several controls about and robotic gloved hands moving about.

"Home sweet home," Donald sighed happily, removing his belt.

"You guys have a place to enter gummi ships?" Aseles asked, amazed.

"Yup!" Goofy said excitedly.

"Pretty cool," she clicked her tongue, smiling widely. Aseles unbuckled herself, but she quickly looked towards Sora's direction, seeing he was....still asleep. Did he....seriously sleep through all that? The guy must really be knocked out, or having a great dream.

"Aseles, go wake up Sora," Donald stated as Goofy followed behind him, leaving the two alone in the gummi ship. Aseles scowled slightly at Donald's command, but went to Sora's side, and shook his shoulder softly.

"Hey Sora, wake up."

"Kairi? Riku?" he mumbled in his slumber. Aseles frowned further, unable to remove the fact that Sora did really miss his friends, and was being destroyed by it. If only she could ease his pain in some way, to show him a bit of happiness while he was searching for them. He flickered his eyes as Aseles quickly removed her frown and grasp on him quickly.

He rubbed his eyes tiredly, and then looked up at her, "What happened?"

"We're here."

"Already?" Sora stood up. He then stretched, "Alright, let's go!" Sora said excitedly, heading to the opening of the gummi ship, Aseles following behind. Sora stared in awe just the same as she did moments before, his eyes scanning among the area. Ahead on the stone platform above was Donald and Goofy, making sure the ship would be provided what it needed for another long journey. But the mere fact that Sora was leading amused Aseles, because he had not the slightly idea of where he was going.

"Hello!" a voice said. Aseles looked down by Donald and Goofy's feet, seeing two chipmunks that wore mechanic aprons, all smudged in oil.

"Hey Chip, hey Dale!" Sora said, bending down on his knees.

"Who's this?" the one with the black nose pointed to Aseles.

"Aseles," Goofy said, and she smiled in return. They smiled back and offered their hands to her. She bent down on her knees as well, shaking them gently.

"Oh yeah! Queen Minnie wants to see you right away!" Dale, the chipmunk with the red nose stated.

"We shouldn't keep her waiting then, let's go," Sora grinned, beginning to run up the stone stairs at the right. Again, Aseles smirked to herself as she followed right behind, Donald looking in disbelief as Goofy chuckled behind.

Up the staircase whirled in a curve, the dark stairway lit with green and yellow stars at the brick wall. Finally reaching the top, Sora opened the doors, revealing a walk-through garden that was beautifully decorated, and inside of the castle walls. At the sides of the doorway stood two huge bushes that were trimmed to look like Goofy and Donald; Goofy in some heavy armor with his helmet concealing his eyes and Donald with his hat also over his eyes.

Sora whistled as he twirled in place once, looking about the hanging banners up on the platform above, and the stretching towers reaching to the sky. Aseles looked up and around the floor, seeing the pathway decorated wonderfully with different kinds of flowers of every color, blooming as the breeze gently blew.

"So...this is where you live?" Sora's eyes sparkled in excitement. Well, one thing was for sure: this world was way brighter than the Beast's Castle. It was so relaxing and peaceful here...

"This place is huge..." Aseles giggled as she began to jump onto a stone shaped plant, surprised to find it bearing her weight. Sora looked after her, grinning as he chased. Aseles giggled louder as she began to run up the green steps of bushes, approaching the top platform with a marvelous view standing over the rest of the garden. Sora caught up as he looked about again, scoffing in amazement.

"You two shouldn't go running off!" Donald called from below.

"Oh, cheer up Donald, they're just having fun," Goofy smiled.

"Just wait until we actually get inside the castle," Sora smirked, whispering to Aseles. She smirked back, giggling.

Suddenly, Goofy pointed behind them, "Look out!" Sora and Aseles swiftly jerked around, but they stumbled back off the ledge, falling into a huge bush below. Aseles groaned as Sora spit out the leaves he caught in his mouth. They shot their keys up, seeing the bundle of Heartless suddenly leaping over after them.

"Blizzard!" Donald shot his wand forward, encasing the air above the struggling and standing Sora and Aseles, freezing the Heartless in midair. Their bodies crashed against the ground, still as stone as the ice gleamed from the sun's rays.

"We gotta go in the castle!" Goofy exclaimed quickly as Aseles darted her eyes about, her eyes trembling to see the whole floor was moving in black pools, almost making the whole floor itself wave.

"C'mon!" Donald called over as the count of Heartless began to triple, Sora slashing his keyblade across and making the way for Aseles behind him. Donald and Goofy rounded a green hedge, and there they slammed a pair of doors open. Sora jumped forward as Aseles skidded to a stop once she was inside, almost crashing onto the close wall inside.

Goofy and Sora slammed the hard, stone doors with a bang, the darkness beginning to leak out of the narrow opening below. Donald pointed forward again, casting a mist of cold ice from the tip of his wand, beginning to press the darkness to the other side. Suddenly, the ice began to crack, and the darkness burst through onto the rugged floor.

"This way!" Goofy said as he ran up the small steps at the left, Donald, Sora and Aseles now following quickly behind.

Aseles shot her eyes behind her, seeing that the pool of darkness was now sweeping across the red rug like a set of lively vines, a faint of a low groan whispering among the air. Looking ahead, she swung her keyblade into view and began to savagely smack against the rising jets of black water from the ground, Sora zigzagging perfectly around with Donald and Goofy beyond Aseles's reach. She panted heavily, trying to keep up as she ran past a set of large, lavender doors at her right, her feet thudding against the rugged floor.

Goofy made it to the doors at the end of the long hallway, Donald running in next and keeping the second door open for Sora and Aseles. Aseles could simply not keep up, feeling the darkness beginning to snap at her ankles, tugging her back. Aseles struggled to move forward, gritting her teeth. She felt a hard grip on her hand, looking to see it was Sora yanking her forward, away from the black mist that had begun to rise around her. However, the doors Donald and Goofy kept open were suddenly blocked by a large wave of Heartlesses, toppling themselves over.

"Look out!" Sora shouted as he tugged Aseles back into the hallway again, but she had found her back pressed against Sora's chest, his arms clasping around her to hold her in. Aseles began to

taste the black ash of the defeated Heartless around, Sora striking his keyblade around as much as he could, but then he too was gone from view. Aseles immediately panicked, feeling his chest leave her and his arms around her no more. Another swarm of Heartless had toppled over, crashing from above like a hurricane.

Aseles flailed, swinging her keyblade in hand, but even the mighty weapon could not hold its own as Aseles whined and choked. Her eyes rapidly swung to and fro, seeing nothing but fast blurs of the bright sky out of the balcony, the red rug, and blue eyes staring right at her.

"Aseles! Hold on!" Sora had called out from a direction, but it was too muffled for Aseles to pinpoint where he actually was. More and more the darkness raged and bashed against her, and she found herself taken within this consuming wickedness. Aseles felt entirely alone, and cold, her stomach lurching and boiling in despair.

*Survive.*

Aseles gritted her teeth, and she growled loudly, tossing her arms at her sides with keyblade brimming silver in hand. The Heartless begins screeched, and a silver barrier thrust itself forward like a dying star, tossing them into the air and out of sight. This sense of invincibility, it was remarkable, unlike anything she had ever experienced. Black ash swept across the air, the barrier passing by Sora as it did no harm. Sora quickly looked up, Aseles's eyes flashing with her hand dropping her keyblade and gripping her head. She fell onto her knees, light-headed as her keyblade vanished from view.

She felt a heave as she was on her feet again, looking up but unable to distinguish the two Sora's into one. She staggered as Sora quickly ran to the doors, tugging Aseles along as best as he could until finally her legs gave way and he was now dragging her into the library of the castle. The doors closed as Aseles's eyes moved about the room uncontrollably, her eyes rolling as the hundreds of books about the shelves of the walls turned into the millions. She closed her eyes with a slam, groaning loudly while slapping her hands to her face.

"What happened?" Donald asked.

"Are you alright?" Sora's voice rang. At a last attempt, Aseles opened her eyes, able to feel the floor beneath her steady. She breathed deeply, but found the air now still, and her eyes looking perfectly at the kneeling Sora and Goofy.

"Yeah...I think- I'm okay..." she placed a hand on her forehead, rubbing it gently.

"Dear, are you sure?" a voice said. Aseles peered up, seeing a mouse approaching, standing in between Sora and Goofy. Her pink dress fluffed about her knees as she rested on the floor, her gloved hands cradling Aseles's face in her grip. She moved her head to the side, then to the other, her crown almost blinding Aseles from the bright lights that hit it in the room. Aseles could feel something cold on her finger, and looked briefly to see she was wearing a wedding ring on her left, ring finger.

"Yeah, I'm...fine," Aseles replied, beginning to stand up as Sora helped her up. Aseles dusted her clothes off, and could only guess that this was Queen Minnie.

Aseles looked among the room some more, seeing a large desk at the center of the room with several parchments and inks resting on top of it. There was also a bone in a bowl next to a throw-pillow against the left side of the wall. The room also had a fireplace made out of gold that was behind the desk, with tall, elaborate paintings resting against the walls, all of them showing the mouse- NO WAY...it was that mouse! Just by his standing pose, Aseles knew this was the same mouse from Beast's Castle. Was this his place, his private quarters?

Donald coughed loudly as Aseles turned, seeing Goofy and him were bowing.

"Oh!" Sora cleared his throat, doing the same. Aseles quickly followed the action.

"Sorry, Your Majesty," Donald said, hitting Sora on the head. Aseles winced a bit, but was relieved to find that Donald did not bother to turn around and smack her.

Minnie giggled a bit, "It's alright."

"Queen Minnie, this is Sora, and Aseles," Goofy said.

"Well, hello Sora, Aseles. It's a pleasure to meet you," Minnie said as she bowed her head. "I've heard so much about you Sora, and you're doing a lot to protect these worlds. You're such a brave man and have much courage," she continued.

Sora then stood up properly, placing his hands behind his head as he usually did, "Thanks!"

Donald then hit him on his leg, "Mind your manners, Sora!" Sora lost his footing, bowing down again with a grunt this time. Minnie slightly frowned, and the four stood up sternly.

Minnie cleared her throat, "I have called you because darkness has surrounded the castle completely. I ask for your help, because no one else knows about this in the castle, so we must warn them," she finished with a fretful face. The castle must be pretty huge then...if no one else knew about it.

"All right then! What are we waiting for?" Sora said as he was about to run out the doors.

"You can't, you'll get lost," Donald quickly interjected, gripping Sora from one of his yellow belts strapped around his waist

"It's that big?" Aseles asked as Goofy nodded.

"I will stay here then, with the queen," a chirpy voice responded. Aseles could've sworn it was coming from Sora's jacket, but to her surprise, there was indeed someone popping out. It was a cricket, dressed with a top hat, overalls, and a jacket. He stood promptly on two feet; Aseles....did not know whether she was going crazy or not at this point.

"You were in there the whole time?" Aseles asked incredulously while Goofy and Donald left the room.

"Oh, Jiminy's the name, Jiminy Cricket at your service," Jimmy said, bowing down his torso.

"How come I've never seen you since the past few days?"

"I've been recording some things and hiding myself in Sora's pockets when we ran into danger," he said.....THE HECK WAS THIS. My god, if these surprises continued, Aseles was sure to lose it.

"What do you want us to do, Your Majesty?" Sora asked, redirecting Aseles's attention back to Minnie.

"I need you both to help me go to the Audience Chamber. We must hurry," she said.

"Uh, may I ask you a question?" Aseles asked. She nodded as Sora raised an eyebrow in Aseles's direction., "Who is that?" she pointed to one of the paintings of the valiant, standing mouse.

“That is King Mickey,” she said with a brightened face.

“You’re married to him,” Aseles indicated to the ring on her finger.

She nodded, smiling brightly, “Come, we must hurry to the Chamber.” Could Aseles really keep her promise not to reveal who had aided her in that castle? What would Aseles say if his *own* wife asked?

Sora opened the door for Minnie and Aseles, Jiminy back in Sora’s jacket somewhere. Minnie led the way as Sora and Aseles followed right behind her. The two stopped when she had faced the lavender doors Aseles had passed earlier. Aseles blinked to notice that the doors themselves were guarded with some kind of barrier, though they dropped abruptly when Minnie had held her hands opened in front of her toward it, immediately calling it down. She walked forward as she opened a small portion of the towering doors, revealing the large room inside when Aseles walked behind her with Sora closing the door behind them.

As the three entered, Aseles’s eyes widened at the scene as she observed the hoard of Bolt Tower Heartlesses occupying every foot of the large room. They rotated around the room on their own accord, their beady, yellow eyes scanning along the ground. The neck of their bodies stayed very still as they hovered about above the ground.

“Oh no!! They’ve gotten past the barrier!” Minnie exclaimed in horror.

“Don’t worry, we’ll handle these guys,” Sora punched the air in determination.

“Sora, there’s too many. You have to make a different approach for this,” Aseles quickly cut in.

“Hmm....I would agree with Aseles,” Minnie replied.

“Alright, any plans then?” Sora replied, flashing his keyblade out. Aseles held her chin in thought, but her eyes redirected to the side columns of the long, white room. They led right down the white hall, and not many of the Heartless were standing near the pillars.

“Let’s go along the sides, next to the wall,” Aseles pointed. “Not all of the Heartless are attacking at once, or else we would’ve been plummeted to the ground already. We sneak past them.”

“Marvelous idea!” Minnie clapped her hands.

Sora nodded, “Alright, lead the way.”

Aseles gulped, “Wait....me?”

“Yeah, it was your idea,” Sora smirked. Aseles furrowed her eyebrows, but sighed and began to walk alongside the wall, looking back to see Sora had let Minnie go in-between the two. Quietly as possible, the trio walked carefully and cautiously across the room.

Aseles’s hunch about the Heartless was correct, for these Heartlesses had not taken any notice of them as they began to make it to the halfway point of the large chamber. They moved constantly near the center of the room, ignorant of the group.

“Asele-“

“Ouf!” Aseles staggered a bit, but her eyes widened as her eyes looked up, staring at the Heartless that she had accidentally bumped into. Aseles instantly pressed her body against the wall as Minnie and Sora copied, looking up at the towering Heartless that began to rotate its face around. Holding their breaths, the Heartless began to turn away, floating off toward the center of the room again



mindlessly. Aseles and Sora sighed in heavy relief, continuing forth to escort the Queen.

Nearing closer to the throne, Aseles noticed a Heartless was heading right into their direction, and it was beginning to gather electricity among the bottom, golden metal rims below its body. Aseles lifted a hand to command a freeze, and the whole group stayed very still. Although, as Aseles waited for the Heartless to redirect, it didn't.

"Run!" Sora swiftly picked up Minnie in his arms as she yelped, wrapping her arms around his neck. Aseles swiftly shot her keyblade into view, tossing the electricity back against the Heartless. The Heartless jerked in the air, but the electricity had phased through its body, and had struck four more surrounding it. An explosion erupted, but Aseles was not surprised to see the Heartless were now raging past the collected smoke of the attack, heading to her direction.

Aseles began to run behind the sprinting Sora with Minnie in his arms, but she quickly turned back, slashing her keyblade against more of the bolts heading her way. She grunted as a sharp surge went across her palm, and she quickly changed the handle to her left hand, using the keyblade as a shield against the slamming bodies of the Heartless.

"Aseles, fall back!" Sora ordered.

"Just go!" Aseles swung her keyblade across, "Fire!" A ring of fire shot out, but the Heartlesses poundings onto the ground made Aseles lose her footing. She staggered forward, but she was smacked right back up into the air, her back hitting against the hard floor. Aseles grunted and winced, but was not quick enough to dodge the massive body weights slamming into her. She flew across the air and rolled along the rug to a stop, trying to dodge the oncoming bolts. She managed to look past the Heartlesses to see Sora leading Minnie to the throne at the end of the hall before she completely saw the red bodies captivate her vision.

SORA'S POV:

Sora had settled Minnie down to the ground as she rushed forward in haste, seeming to search for something among the throne floor. Sora looked at her oddly, wondering what in the world she was doing, but did not question it as he flashed out his weapon in hand and began to run forward, the need to help Aseles in hand.

"Aseles, I'm coming!" he drew closer, but he skidded to a halt to see a blaze of red had taken form in the center of the chaos. His eyes widened to see Aseles's hair had turned a bright red again, and her eyes into red, horizontal slits on her face. Her keyblade rotated ridiculously fast in her grip, and began to ultimately disband the whole group of enemies around her in a matter of seconds.

Sora replayed the words Auron had said moments after Aseles's transformation in the Underworld: *Your friend has something special...and it's best to not interfere when this happens again. She could kill you if she wanted to...*

Sora ran back toward Minnie with his whole upper body bent down, feeling Aseles' raging attacks just above him as she began to slash wildly across. Once he knew he was clear, he looked back as he witnessed Aseles glowing redder as she then began to swiftly move through the Heartlesses, striking them at great speed.

Sora quickly moved back, standing beside Minnie who was still continuing her search for something. Each Heartless began to vanish in a blink of an eye as Sora tried to catch up to the glowing ruby that was shifting back and forth across the room. After a few seconds, all the Heartlesses had been vanquished; their black dust disappearing before it even touched the ground. Sora swallowed as he looked up, seeing Aseles standing right in front of the door, her red eyes locked onto him...and Minnie with her body hovering in the air a couple of feet.

"Umm, you wouldn't mind hurrying up a bit, would you?" Sora hurried forward, standing defensively in front of the throne. Minnie hummed worriedly as she began to search more quickly, mumbling to herself about a switch of some sort.

Aseles stood very still as Sora saw her grip tighten on her keyblade, her knuckle bones white as snow in the distance, Sora immediately feeling the tension in the room, preparing himself for the worst.

"Here it is!!" Minnie exclaimed happily from behind. Sora turned just slightly, the corner of his eyes catching the whole platform of the throne moving so slowly to the right side. Sora quickly turned back toward Aseles, seeing her teeth bare and gritting against each other. She charged.

Sora stood his ground as Aseles advanced forward, her body flying across the air rapidly, making the rug below her flutter. She was about to strike when suddenly a light from behind Sora blinded the whole room, causing him to hold his keyblade forward, unknowing if he would dodge the death-defying attack.

Sora kept his eyes closed, waiting for the attack, but nothing happened. He opened them, finding the room back to its normal light from before, finding Aseles on the ground just a few feet in front of him. She appeared unconscious, with her wild transformation gone. He quickly placed his keyblade away and went beside her, laying her back against the rug with her face looking up at his. He nudged her gently, and he then saw her eyes flickering open a few moments later.

ASELES'S POV:

*Don't fail me now...you have so much to do.*

Aseles squinted against the light of the room, looking up to see most of the view consisted of Sora's face. She groaned as she blinked slowly, shaking her head. The last thing she remembered was the Heartlesses charging at her....but-

Aseles jerked her body up, almost hitting Sora right on the forehead as he drew back. The room spun wildly as Aseles breathed heavily, trying to regain the steadiness of the world around her. She bent her legs, and she began to stand. She looked about to see that she had been laying on the ground in front of the throne, but...how did she get all the way over here?

"You...saved me?" Aseles asked to Sora who held a stern expression.

"No, I didn't," he replied. Aseles's eyes widened a bit, and she swiftly looked about. She opened her mouth, but clamped a shut.

"What....happened?" Aseles hurriedly looked to Minnie, "I-I didn't hurt you, did I!?"

"No, of course not," she shook her head.

"But-then....what-?" Aseles shot her eyes toward Sora.

"I'll tell you about it later," Sora replied. Oh no...not again.

"Thank you for helping me. Now, let's get moving, I would like to show you something," the Queen responded, beginning to descend down some stairs of the opened floor beside the throne. When did that happen?

Sora locked his eyes in Aseles's direction, but she quickly followed right behind Minnie, avoiding his gaze. A jolt of pain was beginning to grow at the side of her head, but she quickly reacted, gripping the strands of her hair there and pulling them firmly. What the heck was this?

"Are you alright?" Sora quickly asked, placing his hand on her shoulder.

Aseles jumped, but cleared her throat, "Yeah...I'm fine." She saw her reflection flash in his eyes, and she immediately looked away, paying attention back to the dimmed room they had entered.

It was a large, gray room, but it was covered immensely by large, thick vines with piercing thorns. They were massive in size, and seeming to be striking out of every section of the room to cover the walls and ceiling entirely. Walking forward, Aseles saw Minnie standing in front of a large object, and she copied with Sora on her left side. In front of her laid a bright, orb of light, with a crystal surface glowing from the shining and flying twinkles of light within it. The large sphere was placed on silver, curving throne of its own, locked in place.

"Oh, what I'm I going to do?" Minnie folded her hands in front of her with a melancholy face. She seemed so distraught; Aseles herself didn't know what was happening, but the fact that her castle was being infiltrated by evil sorcery was enough to make one confused on what to do.

"What is this?" Sora asked, taking a couple of steps forward to look at the orb. Aseles redirected her attention toward the entrance, surprised to see Goofy and Donald come in, panting with their hands on their knees.

"This is the Cornerstone," Minnie began. Aseles looked back toward the orb, completely entranced by its glowing light as Minnie continued, "It prevents Darkness from entering the castle's walls. However, when I came down to check on it, these thorns were in the room. The next thing you know, Heartless swarmed all over the castle. We don't even where they had come from..." she finished. Well that was unfortunate.

"We'll stop it," Sora added, "How hard is it to find the culprit?"

"Hahahaha!" A voice suddenly cackled highly in the room. Aseles's eyes darted quickly among the room, completely fed up with all of these surprises at this point. Whoever it was...didn't sound too friendly.

"Who's there?" Donald demanded, flashing out his wand in haste as he and Goofy took defense positions beside Minnie.

"Who else?" the voice echoed again. A small flame of green fire spat in front of the Cornerstone, the raging flames diminishing to reveal a strange woman in black robes. She was embedded with neon-green skin and black, curved horns that rose from her head. She wore a black, long ragged cloak that covered her feet, and in her green palm she held a staff with a green orb at the top.

"Maleficent!" Sora, Donald, and Goofy yelled in fury. Aseles stared intently at the woman, her mouth parting open slightly. This woman.....she looked.....rather familiar, but by the look of her appearance, she didn't seem to be good news. To support her theory, the reaction of everyone else in the room indicated so.

"Ah, your Highness, a pleasure to meet you," Maleficent bowed as she turned, a grin spread across her thin, red lips as she stood back up perfectly straight, easily towering everyone else.

"What do you want?" Minnie asked bravely. Tough mouse.

"Well, my Queen, I want this castle to myself. It can provide some use to me," Maleficent smiled again. Her face then turned toward the rest of the group, "I see you have these brats here. But wait, there's another." Her dark, evil eyes glowered over to Aseles, a look of grandeur on her face. She took a step forward, and another as Aseles backed up a step, flashing out her keyblade in place. She could feel this sensation, a feeling she couldn't describe, a feeling of certain rage and

anguish. Before Aseles could charge, she noticed that the woman was almost pixelated: Maleficent was just a hologram.

"We haven't had the chance to get to know on another, and yet, you take the side of these incompetent fools," she yelled, "and you don't even know who I am..."

"I'd rather *not* know," Aseles responded.

"Why are you here!?! " Sora asked immediately, standing in front of Aseles with Goofy and Donald doing the same.

"To conquer the Cornerstone, and to take over this castle," she pointed out and turned toward Minnie. "My apologies my Queen but I do what I must do," she cackled a hearty laugh.

"You're not going to get away with it!" Goofy said Sora and Donald nodded in agreement. Maleficent laughed once again, her mocking smile vanishing slowly as her whole hologram began to disintegrate from view. Great, just perfect. The room fell to silence.

"Do you think Merlin can help us??" Goofy suggested next. Everyone's eyes shot up in brilliance.

"Yeah!" Donald and Sora said.

"May Aseles please stay? To keep me company?" Queen Minnie responded.

Aseles blinked, but nodded as she looked toward Sora, Donald and Goofy, "I'll be careful, I promise."

Sora took a couple of steps forward, and stood in front of Aseles, whispering, "Do not...leave this room." Aseles blinked slowly, but she quickly nodded at his threat. Sora nodded once, easing his demeanor as he walked away, signaling Donald and Goofy to follow him. Aseles motioned her way over to Minnie, feeling quite....strange. Was Sora worried that she would do something wrong?

After their leave, Aseles turned her attention back to Minnie, somewhat puzzled of Minnie's request. Why did she ask Aseles to stay specifically? Shrugging, Aseles sat crisscrossed on the floor, feeling the coolness of the floor collect around her thought. She blinked and stared at the Cornerstone, but they redirected when they saw Minnie walking into view.

"Aseles, I've heard a few things about you," she began, looking at the Cornerstone with her hands folded in front of her. Yeah, Aseles sensed she wanted her to stay for something. But who the heck could've possibly mentioned about her?

"From who-" Aseles stopped, finding that Minnie had not finished talking. Aseles cleared her throat, and waited.

She continued, "Mickey told me when he was fighting with you at the other castle. He advised me not to tell Sora, Donald, and Goofy where his whereabouts were, but then...I don't know where he is at all." Aseles sat perfectly still, her fingers clamping each other. If she didn't know where he was, then how was he able to communicate with her in the first place?

"What did he tell you?" she turned, facing Aseles directly.

Aseles gathered your words, thinking aloud, "He told me not to tell anything to Sora and the others anything about him but...that was it." At least she didn't have to lie to *her*.

"I see," she placed her hand on her cheek, only being able to express sadness.

"But I'm sure he's alright. Don't worry about him. I mean, he's very from what I could tell," Aseles quickly pointed out.

"Thank you," Minnie smiled, nodding as she folded her gloved hands across her dress again. Once again, silence grew as Aseles stared at the Cornerstone for some time. Half an hour had passed until Minnie spoke once more, collecting Aseles from her small nap.

"He told me that you have a keyblade, though I was skeptical at first when I heard the news," she said. "Why do you possess one?"

Aseles blinked rapidly, looking at the stand of the Cornerstone. She swallowed roughly, but she shook her head slowly. Why was it that she possessed one? How could someone even get one?

"Not to sound....stupid but....I don't know much about a keyblade, except it's great for swinging around and unlocking things," Aseles replied, looking toward Minnie.

"Well, a keyblade is indeed a special weapon, and not many people have one. The weapon *chooses* its wielder," Minnie replied.

"Wait...it chooses? How can it do that?" Aseles scrunched her eyebrows together.

"That's what makes it special," Minnie replied.

"Then.....I...don't know why it would choose someone like *me*," Aseles placed her hands in her pockets, and stared at the floor.

"What would be your guess?" she asked politely. Another few minutes....

"I guess....the keyblade brought me here...on purpose. I mean....I had nowhere else to go...but then I don't remember much of what happened before. It's all a blur to me.....I'm not sure if my world really disappeared," Aseles replied hesitantly.

"I see. Seeing that this was something we could not discuss with the others, we'll keep it as a secret between us."

"Hey, um, Minnie? Who was that woman, Maleficent?" Aseles asked.

"She's an evil sorcerer, who had worked with some other villains before. She's tried to control the Heartless last time, but failed when Sora, Donald and Goofy stepped in. Now she's come back to rule this castle unfortunately, by whatever means necessary. I hope we find a way to stop her," she said.

"Oh....well with them back, they I'm sure they'll stop here," Aseles replied.

"You will aid them, won't you?" Minnie asked. Aseles nodded. She smiled, turning to look at the Cornerstone, "Hopefully, Merlin can find a way."

"Um, can you tell me more about this Cornerstone?" Aseles asked, her vibrant eyes looking to it.

Minnie nodded, "The Cornerstone of Light protects this castle from darkness that tries to enter from the outside, and has been here for many decades. It was made before the castle was built. We must find how the darkness has entered the castle, or how Maleficent was even able to break past the barrier of it. It's never happened before," she stated. Aseles looked toward the object, squinting her eyes fixedly to it.

"Is something wrong?" the Queen asked.

"W-What? Huh? Oh no...It's just..." Aseles gripped her forehead softly, smacking it gently. She looked at the Cornerstone again, but found nothing else bizarre about it. She shook her head; she was probably just seeing things....

"We're back!" Sora's voice boomed from behind, making Aseles jump slightly. How the heck-that was incredibly fast. Walking down the steps were Donald, Goofy and the wizard named Merlin behind Sora.

"Oh, thank you so much Merlin," Minnie said, walking toward him as Aseles stood and followed behind.

"My pleasure, your Majesty," Merlin replied, bowing with courtesy and a smile.

"This is what I wanted to show you," Minnie said, facing the Cornerstone.

"Oh my," Merlin looked at the scene with a blank expression. The rest stood side by side, seeing Merlin walk toward the Cornerstone, observing it with squinting eyes and a finger gripping his chin.

"Hmmm....very unusual...." he whispered to himself.

"Is there anything we can do?" Sora asked on behalf of everyone else.

Merlin turned to look toward him and smiled, "Yes, there is. But there is only one way to do it, and it could be dangerous, not to mention, disastrous."

"What is it?" Sora persisted.

"You'll see for yourselves gentlemen, and lady," Merlin said wisely. He began to head from the Cornerstone, looking at the wall at the side. He cleared his throat and took out his wand. He waved it and muttered a few words, making a silver, antique door appear in a pop of lavender smoke falling around its base. Aseles dropped her head slightly, staring at its glossy and curving exterior.

"What's behind the door?" Goofy asked, scratching his nose.

"In there is your ticket to saving the castle. But let me warn you: YOU MUST NOT MEDDLE IN THERE. Understand?" Merlin pointed his wand to each of the four, "You might be tempted to do certain actions...." The four looked at each other in puzzlement, unsure of what he was referring to.

"You may proceed," Merlin signaled his empty hand to the door, stepping away from it.

"Do be careful," Minnie advised. Sora nodded and walked toward the silver doors first, slightly opening one as the rest peeked inside, seeing a blinding light consume the whole room. Sora then opened all of the doors completely, with Aseles peering in.

"Together?" Sora asked, looking at the trio around him.

"Together!" Donald and Goofy nodded. Sora reached a hand toward Aseles, and she looked at it. His fingers curled, and she took his hand, feeling his firm hand clamp around her own. He jumped forward as Aseles followed with a shout of surprise, feeling a rush of air kick around her, and the light completely drowning all sound from her ears.

## Timeless River

As the light faded, Aseles found herself thrown through the jumbling doors, yelling as she hit the grassy floor beneath her. She felt her hair fly back then fall messily on the back of her head. She lifted her face up to spit the dirt from her tongue.

Aseles flickered her eyes rapidly, quite...unsure why the color was gone. Before she could properly stand, a sudden weight tipped her down quite harshly, making her groan and slap her face against the ground. Aseles's eyes rolled around a bit in her eyes, but she shook it off, looking up to see the three forces that had plummeted against her. Sora, Donald, and Goofy were sprawled up on top of each other with their weight greatly pushing against her. Air....AIR....

"What...happened..?" Sora groaned from the top of the pile, rubbing his face.

"I don't know...MIND GETTING OFF?" Aseles flailed her arms, gasping for air and to mainly stop eating the dirt.

"Oh! Sorry!" all three replied as they stood up hurriedly. Aseles grumbled, hitting her clothes for dust and brushing her arm against her mouth. Different color, but dirt all tasted the same.

"What is this?" Sora stared at his gloved hands, and simplified clothes. His eyes had turned into complete black, cartoon eyes, and his face was much rounder. Aseles blinked to him in surprise. Why had he transformed in appearance?

"This is kind of like...uh," Donald began as he looked at his twitching tail. He appeared much like a cartoon as well, appearing to wear some sort of sailor suit with a rounded hat on his head than his usual one.

"Deja vu?" Goofy added, scratching his head. He wore his simplified hat, along with his huge shoes and a vest. Mostly the features on his face had changed.

"Yeah!" Donald said.

"Really? You've been here before?" Sora asked.

"Why...did you guys change?" Aseles questioned.

"So did you," Goofy pointed out. Aseles raised an eyebrow, and lifted her gloved hands up toward her face. She blinked rapidly, and then began to shoot her eyes across her own body. She could feel her high ponytail swat against her back, and brushed her gloved hand against her rounded, firm chin. She tugged at her V-shirt, and swatted at her tight pants that were nearly glued to her slim legs. Well...this was certainly new.

"Er...so where do we go from here?" Aseles asked, looking about the open area, patches of healthy grass swaying in the wind. A small ledge of hill was near at her right with a picket fence surrounding the whole area.

"I don't know," Sora said. It seemed they were all unsure of where they were...or what the objective was at hand. Why the heck did Merlin even send them there for?

Aseles's ears suddenly wired on as she turned, seeing someone sprinting past by. It was a wide character, wearing overalls with whiskers sticking out of his face. He was soon passing underneath a sign at the far side that read "Pier", gripping onto his small hat to make sure it didn't fall off of his head.

"Hey, uh, didn't that person look familiar?" Goofy asked, tapping his head with his finger. Sora and Donald did the same, trying to decipher on who was the mysterious stranger that passed. Aseles wanted to smack herself on the forehead.

"Wasn't that Pete?" she questioned flatly.

"How do you know?" Donald asked with his foot tapping.

"Uh, instinct," she responded back.

"Oh..." Goofy nodded slowly.

"Maybe he's the one causing trouble around here! Let's go get him!" Sora suggested, running to where Pete had run. Donald followed right behind as Goofy and Aseles ran behind in pursuit.

"But something seems strange..." Goofy added.

"Hey, Sora, Donald, stop!" Aseles called out, catching up to them as Goofy huffed behind. However, Sora and Donald weren't able to hear as they continued to run, sprinting down a grassy hill and disappearing from view.

Aseles finally managed to see them as she huffed to the top of the hill, viewing down to see the two approaching the Pier and the unsuspecting Pete below. At the end of the hill flowed a stream of a river, with some sort of ticket booth standing on the boarded floor just beside a small lifeboat. There also was a path that led somewhere else to the west.

Aseles gripped her knees, panting from the running as Goofy did the same, finally able to catch up. Aseles eyes widened to see Sora and Donald below, preventing Pete from going toward the small booth.

"It's over Pete!" Sora said, taking out his keyblade and Donald taking out his wand.

"How do you know my name?" Pete asked in shock.

"Don't act dumb, we know it's you!" Donald yelled.

"What are y'all talking about?!" Pete asked, frustrated with his big fingers scratching his head.

"Stop!" Aseles yelled to Sora and Donald as she almost tripped on the way down, Goofy running behind her. The group looked at her perplexed as she approached, heaving, "You've got...the wrong....Pete!"

"I'm the only Pete around here, what you are babbling about?!?" Pete persisted, "Are you trying to steal me steamboat?!"

"Huh?" Sora said.

"What steamboat?" Aseles opened up her arms questionably.

"I knew it!" Pete said again, and suddenly charged toward her. Aseles yelped as his huge, hairy palm gripped her by the collar of her shirt, lifting her clean off the. So much for making peace.

"Hey, put her down!" Sora commanded. Pete suddenly threw Aseles across like a flying saucer, making her smack right against Goofy as both fell to the ground.

"Hey!" Sora shouted in anger. He ran toward Pete, and smacked him straight on target, making



him spin in circles and hit a tree that was planted in the middle of the flat area of the hill. Pete grew dizzy and confused, trying to regain his balance as he stood. Goofy managed to get up from below Aseles and helped her on her feet as she could see the stars literally circling around her head.

"What?" she mumbled.

"You okay, Aseles?" Goofy asked.

"Yeah..." she said, falling backwards as Goofy caught her quickly by the arms.

"How many fingers I'm I holding?" Goofy asked, holding up three.

"N-Nine?" she replied, unable to keep her eyes from spinning. After a few moments, her vision began to clear. Goofy and Aseles turned to see Pete knocked out, Sora and Donald holding their weapons strongly in their palms.

"Ow, my head," Aseles stated. "Hey, Goofy, how come you're not dizzy? I hit you...pretty hard."

"I always get hit on the head," Goofy pointed out, tapping his noggin. She raised an eyebrow to him, but shook her head at his response. The two walked toward Sora and Donald, seeing Pete beginning to stand up.

"Why I outdo! Oh! My back!" Pete exclaimed, heading toward the river bank, slouching.

"Hey, fellas, something's not quite right," Goofy whispered as the four huddled in a circle.

"I'm starting to think the same thing," Sora whispered.

"I've think we've got the wrong Pete," Aseles tried again. From appearance....it might be Pete from the other colored world, but this guy seemed so clueless as to what was going on.

"I think you're right," Donald said, "He hasn't done anything bad."

"I guess we have to go apologize?" Aseles suggested, Donald and Goofy nodding.

The group of four began to walk toward the damaged Pete, Goofy making the first move, "Sorry about attacking you like that Capt'n Pete," Goofy replied.

"We thought you were somebody else," Sora apologized next.

"I've got to find the pipsqueak that stole my steamboat!" Pete added quickly.

"We're really sorry," Aseles added next.

"Well, if you all are so sorry, find me my steamboat!" Pete said as the four backed a few steps; man, the guy had the shortest temper she had ever seen. Yeah, he wasn't much different than his future being. His back suddenly cracked again.

"OW!" Pete exclaimed again. The four immediately ran to his aid, trying to repair the damage that was made....er, in this case, mend the bones they had probably broken.

FFW:

Standing on Cornerstone Hill, Aseles's eyes were fixated on the sudden appearance of the Cornerstone, watching it glimmer in a magical radiance at the center of the area. It was quite odd seeing something brighter than the color white. Yes, it was that bright; it hurt just to look at it.

"What do we do now?" Aseles asked, turning toward the others.

"We've got to find the bad guy that's really the bad guy, right?" Donald asked.

"Right," Sora said, a bit hesitant. "That shouldn't be too hard...."

"Hey, what's that?" Goofy asked, pointing forward. The rest turned from the circle, viewing some sort of curtained window floating in front of the silver doors they had entered from before. They headed to it, now standing in front of the darkened shaded curtain. What was this?

"I can't see a thing," Sora stated. Donald walked to the side, looking behind it for some switch of some kind. He then saw the yarn hanging beside the end, connected to the top hinges of the curtain. He pulled it cautiously, causing the curtains to move to the sides, showing a small scene of some sort of movie:

*Four, identical windows floated around the Cornerstone.*

*The Heartlesses stood there, looking at various windows as they opened, inviting the Heartless as they gladly accepted.*

*The windows started to disappear, a silver door suddenly appearing next.*

*Aseles was the first to fly out of the doors, followed by Sora, Donald, and Goofy landing on top of her....*

The curtains pulled back as the clip ended.

"Whoa, what was that?" Sora asked, looking at the window still.

"Heartless going, and us coming in," Aseles replied.

"What could it mean?" Goofy asked. Donald again headed to the window, and pulled down the string: nothing happened.

"Well, let's get rid of those Heartless first. That's the only objective we have right now as far as knowing what we should do," Sora added. They all turned from the window, looking past the Cornerstone to see the same windows from the clip appear around in the flesh.

"But we promised Captain Pete that we would find his steamboat," Aseles recalled as Goofy nodded in agreement.

"We'll worry about that later," Sora said again, heading to the left-end window first. Er...right. The rest shrugged and followed, opening the curtains and hopping inside the opened window.

There was a bright flash, and Aseles found herself appearing on top of a construction site, standing on a huge, board platform held by a thick cord of wire in the middle.

"What are they building?" Sora asked, looking around curiously with a tilted head. Suddenly, a Heartless that had a hammer for a head jumped onto the platform in front of him, cornering him at the edge. The rest headed toward his aid swiftly, weapons drawn. Suddenly, a mouse clinging onto a rope swung by, kicking the Heartless dead center on its face and sending him up, disappearing in a twinkle. The mouse landed safely on the board, facing the four.

"Hey, thanks," Sora began as the mouse waved to the four, climbing the cord and jumping out of sight.

"Wasn't that the king?" Aseles asked, noticing the familiarity...somewhat.

"Yup, that sure was him," Goofy said.

"Hey, so doesn't that mean we're in the-" Donald was suddenly interrupted. The same Heartless from before plummeted onto the platform once again, blocking any escape. The four stood back to back, cornered as the platform began to swing shakily from side to side. Aseles could feel the massive weight on the board; it couldn't possibly hold for much long.

With weapons out, the group charged forward as the Heartless began to multiply in numbers, smacking their hammer-noses onto the floor. The platform swung and shook terribly. One Heartless then hit the board, sending all of them into the air. Aseles landed roughly onto her bottom, looking around quickly to witness a few Heartless flying off the board. She looked toward Donald and Goofy who were fending off their end, but she couldn't spot Sora anywhere. Her eyes quickly directed to the edge of the platform, seeing a glove hanging strongly.

"Sora!" she yelled and ran forward, seeing Sora hanging on for dear life. His hand lost its grip as he started to descend. She threw herself onto the floor, gripping his wrist in time with her torso hanging from the board. Her lower abdomen pressed against the edge of the platform with legs wrapped around the keyblade which she had stabbed into the wooden floor moments before.

"Hang on tight!" she looked down at him. She began to heave, pulling him up, and managing to place her arms around his chest with his arms wrapping around her neck. She suddenly looked past him, viewing how high they...actually were....WOW..... It was a long way down.....

"Don't look down! Look at me!" Sora stated quickly. Aseles averted her eyes, and stared at his orbs as she began to pull herself up, Sora's hands gripping the platform again as he climbed on top.

"Thanks," Sora sighed in relief, helping Aseles stand.

"No problem," she said, looking at him with a wide smile. Before he could return the gesture, the platform jerked as they both stumbled, looking back to see Donald and Goofy were in need of help.

"Oh, right!" Sora replied, letting go as he swung his keyblade in hand, assisting Donald and Goofy. Aseles withdrew her keyblade from the ground as she followed suite, the Heartless soon diminishing in numbers as several of the wire cord began to snap. Donald threw a thunder spell, seeing the smoking Heartless fly off the platform, hitting the beams of the construction site and fall to the dirt ground below.

"Whew!" Donald wiped his forehead. The rest sighed in relief, placing their weapons away and falling against the platform shakily. That was close.

Aseles felt something land onto the platform and shot herself up, seeing the familiar Mickey approaching in a hurry. He gripped Sora's hand, shook it energetically, and ran past the group, giving a final wave.

"Hey look! There's a window," Goofy pointed. They all stood rapidly as Donald made his way toward the rope at the side, revealing the next clip:

*"You absolute idiot! You've managed to fail at everything! And what's more....you foolishly thought you could take my place while I was away .Well, as of now, you're finished. Mark my words; there will be no place for you when our time comes!" the female voice finished. She started to walk away from what looked like a room, her black robes running along the ground.*

*"Useless imbecile."*

*"But-but.....but I....." the person Maleficent was yelling at stated.....holding out a rounded, thick, gloved hand.....*

"Whoa, someone was sure angry," Goofy said.

"But I don't understand..." Sora said, scratching his head.

"Hmmm...What did she mean when the person took her place?" Aseles asked. She wasn't sure if she was the only one that recognized Maleficent's voice, but didn't press the matter.

"Who knows, it could be anybody," Sora said.

"Yeah," Donald said, agreeing with Sora.

"Well, what happens if we go get rid of more Heartless, and open other windows?" Goofy suggested. "Ya think we'll find out more?"

"Worth a try," Sora replied, "Let's head back."

MOMENTS LATER:

Standing nearby the Cornerstone, Aseles preferred sitting beside it and resting as she looked toward the conversing group a yard away. Donald and Goofy seemed to be mainly trying to rope this all together, while Sora just grew concerned of the Heartless in the next window. However, he had this look on his face...he looked...somewhat tired, but Aseles was baffled on how he was still putting his own input of the situation at hand; this kid could keep going....as if nothing would stop him.

Aseles could only try to imagine how he looked before in their previous adventure, and how hard it must've been to achieve. Sora seemed drained, and she....felt somewhat sorry for him, but knew that motion was almost an insult to someone like Sora; Sora did not need sympathy, because he kept on going no matter the dangers ahead. In the other hand....Aseles grew worried because at this point in time, she felt worn out completely, and knowing that the problem in Disney Castle was a huge issue, how long would it take to clear all those infiltrating darkness of thorns inside the stone walls? For a brief second....Aseles wished she was back at home.

"Come on Aseles, time to go," Sora waved his hand in front of her face.

"Huh...Oh," she stood up hurriedly, stumbling a bit on her feet before dusting the back of her legs off.

"Ready?" Donald asked as Goofy and Sora nodded in agreement. Donald then headed toward the next window as Aseles slumped behind the trio. In they went, and she waited for the blinding light to dim. It appeared that the next piece of land consisted of a dark street, with a building....on fire. PERFECT.

The other buildings at the side were almost hidden in shadow from the roaring flames of the center building with roadblocks preventing any kind of car or persona to enter the facility. She guessed that they themselves would be the firefighters.

"Hey! Look!" Sora said. Aseles turned, seeing the king waving his arms and besides the burning building in front, "He needs our help!" No Sora....he just wants the flames to go higher.

Aseles flashed out hey keyblade, charging toward the walking flames approaching the building.

She swung accurately, despite the rampaging throbbing in her arms. The flames turned, but they were too late to dodge the head-on attacks and were turned to ash against the concrete floor.

“Heartless approaching!” Sora called out. Aseles turned, and in the distance she could see something bright arriving, almost like headlights. She was proven correct with a car had stopped in front of the group, standing on its bumper and its bottom two wheels with the front wheels now punching the air frantically. Its mouth turned into sharp teeth and its headlights narrowed to be its eyes. It then threw itself onto the floor on all fours, and drove forward rapidly, and Aseles wasted no time in ducking out of the way, hearing the blaring horn run past her and its rubber skidding against the ground in tight squeals.

The car swerved to the left, spinning out of control and unexpectedly regained its momentum. It raced forward again as Aseles rolled out of the way on her front and back, grunting as she shot her head up. However, she was met with an unpleasant surprise, seeing a second Hot Rod Heartless springing into view. It charged without warning, but as soon as Aseles hit the ground with her feet, she was thrown back roughly into the air, her back hitting against the wall of the steaming building behind her. The bricks were hot against her back, and she fell upon the hard ground with a thud, feeling paralyzed from the hit. Her hair flew out of her face as she felt herself almost dragged along the stone ground, feeling her skin burn and scrap at the verge of peelings off of her very bones. She picked up her head as best as she could, seeing the car was now paying attention to the others, revving in rage.

"Come....on," Aseles growled to herself, looking beside to see her keyblade was away in arm's reach. She felt her body scorching in agony as she moved forward, grunting and groaning as she shut her eyes, trying to push the pain away, trying to cleanse her mind of any of it. She stopped and fell flat against the ground, the sweat dripping down her temples and face as she looked past her messy bangs, seeing Sora trying to fend off the two Hot Rods while Donald and Goofy were trying desperately to get out of their daze.

"I...have to help them....any way I can...." Aseles grunted to herself, and she crawled forward now, her hand smacking against the black top, her fingers absently missing grabbing the handle of her keyblade that was somewhere in front of her.

There was the sound of an engine, and Aseles shot her eyes to the side, seeing one Hot Rod shoot its way toward her direction. It revved in retaliation as Aseles's eyes widened in fright. She threw herself forward in haste, the keyblade stumbling in her hand. The Heartless charged with burning wheels.

“Run, Aseles!” Donald's voice cried out. Aseles's eyes narrowed as as the blaring horn of the car rushed in haste. Aseles could feel the headlights against her face as she hurriedly stood.

“Take. THIS!” Aseles spun full in a circle, feeling the rush of this immense power within her hands, within her keyblade as it shined brightly, making her whole body quake. She swung her keyblade at the side with both hands, and felt the mechanical parts of the car fly around her. She looked up to see the Heartless flew into the air, its head hitting against the pavement and becoming dismantled instantly.

“Oh...crap...” Aseles trembled in place. She looked up to see the second Hot Rod had turned to ash at Goofy's feet, with Sora's keyblade flying back into his hand. The trio began to hurry forward toward Aseles, making a small circle.

“....Looks like...we got a beating this time,” Sora scoffed slightly, looking among the group as Aseles followed. Donald's face was bruised with a large wound across his arm. Goofy had some scratches among his arms and face. At last, Sora's arms were bruised, but that was practically it.

"Cura," Donald raised his wand up, and a glittering flicker of light consumed the group. The damage was completely healed, and Aseles felt instantly better from the skin that almost came off of her. She dusted her shoulders off as Donald smoothed out his feathers.

With the group turning, they saw that the building stopped burning with only a shroud of smoke appearing at its top into the night sky. There was a clatter of footsteps, and out of nowhere Mickey appeared, shaking Sora's hand again, waving a goodbye, and rushing off into a nearby thicket of bushes behind.

"Hey, look!" Donald pointed to another window that had appeared beside the building. He approached it and pulled the string, revealing another clip with Sora, Goofy and Aseles standing in front of it:

*"Aw, for cryin' out loud...she didn't have to go and say that. Okay, I mighta messed up every now and then. But I'm a lot more things than useless....Why, when I was startin' out...Oh....I miss those good ol' days....What I wouldn't give to go back in time...What I wouldn't give...."*

*There was a brief moment of sobbing...but something beside out of view flashed into view. The direction of the screen turned, showing a pair of silver, curving doors.*

*"Huh?" the person walked closer to the doors, observing them carefully. Then they grabbed the handles and opened them with curiosity, "Hey! That looks like-"*

BACK AT CORNERSTONE HILL:

"What in the world did that one mean?" Sora asked.

"That looked like the door that Merlin poofed up, but-" Aseles gripped her chin.

"But what?" Donald asked.

"Umm, never mind," Aseles replied

"No, what is it?" Sora persisted.

"Well, it looks like Pete is behind all of this," Aseles sighed. Could they not honestly recognize the voice?

"But we already know that it's not Pete," Sora shrugged.

"But something isn't right," Goofy added.

"We could keep finishing off the Heartless," Aseles replied, "Just to make sure."

"Right," Donald agreed as Sora and Goofy nodded. Boy....this was beginning to become more complicated.

FEW MOMENTS LATER:

After entering the next window that was in line, the area consisted of a small town of houses and roads, with the chimneys barely passing Aseles's ankles. It seemed like doll houses to her, and she kneeled every passing step, looking along the small place in awe.

"Whoa! The whole town shrunk!" Sora said excitedly as he hurried forward, his mouth opening and closing in gasps.

"Don't step on anything, Sora!" Goofy called out.

"Hey look!" Sora pointed to a tower that was positioned at the center of the area, little cannons sticking out of its circular surface of stone. "Look at the toy cannons!" Sora circled around the half-sized tower in amazement. Aseles rolled her eyes as she watched her feet carefully, standing beside Sora as Donald and Goofy looked among the ground questionably.

Aseles raised a brow, and felt something moving along the edge of the town. She looked past the tower, seeing Mickey was there once more, but he was frenziedly waving his arms around him, pointing at the group.

"....Hey!" Sora answered back with flailing arms as well. Aseles stared at him with a deadpanned expression.

"Sora, I think he's trying to warn us," Goofy added.

"Uh oh..." Aseles whirled her head around, seeing morphing black orbs in the air turn into Heartless. They reminded her of air pilots with their Heartless sign painted across on its side of the small aircraft. To make matters worse, more of those hammer-nosed Heartless were spitting out of thin air...literally. As Sora, Donald and Goofy turned, Mickey was already gone, and the four were soon surrounded and outnumbered.

"Um, anyone got any ideas?" Aseles asked.

"Not really," Donald answered as he shook.

"Hey! I've got an idea!!" Sora snapped his finger, nodding proudly. The rest looked to him, and waited. The Heartless drew closer, Sora still in the same position as before.

"Well hurry!! They're coming!" Aseles waved her arms frantically.

"Oh! Right! Duck!!" Sora smiled widely.

"What is it?" Donald huffed.

"NO, I think he means-DUCK!" Aseles gripped onto the collar of Donald's shirt and yanked him down. Sora slammed his fist against the top of the tower, throwing himself onto the floor beside Goofy. The cannons of the tower sprung to life and began to pop furiously with its full ammo, the small explosions of the cannons cracking in Aseles's ears. She looked up to see the Heartless being thrown back, turning into ash as they were struck by the firing, toy cannons. After a few moments of falling smoke, the dust cleared, revealing the town bare and safe.

"Wow Sora, that was pretty smart," Donald stood up, fixing the feathers that Aseles had accidentally plucked off.

"Hey, thanks.....Wait, what's that supposed to mean?" Sora crossed his arms, glaring at Donald.

"Hey, it's the king," Goofy pointed. Aseles followed, but as soon as Goofy pointed him out, the little mouse rushed forward, shook Sora's hand once more, and waved goodbye before disappearing. Well...he still had the knack of coming out at the right time.

The group of four turned to see a floating window hovered above the center of the town's guarding walls. They headed toward it as Donald pulled the string of it, revealing another clip:

*"Fascinating...This appears to be a portal to the past!" Maleficent was now in full view.*

*"Yeah, it was the strangest thing!" Pete said.*

*"Stop gawking! And start thinking of a way we can use it to our advantage!" Maleficent stated wickedly.*

*"Okay."*

*"Now, perhaps I could give you one more chance to redeem yourself."*

*Pete put his hands together saying "Oh, thank you, thank you! You can count on me.....! So what do I do?"*

*"Patience, my dear....What have we here? Well, if it isn't the Cornerstone of Light...Mmm.....Now we can take the castle from those fools—but we'll have to proceed with the utmost of care..."*

BACK AT CORNERSTONE HILL:

...Well...crap.

"What do you think they're going to do with the Cornerstone?" Donald asked.

"We have one more window to go," Sora stated determinedly. "If we defeat the Heartless there, maybe it will tell us what they're planning. You guys ready?"

"Ready." Sora nodded as he jumped through the last window at the end, with Donald, Goofy and Aseles leaping behind him.

In this window, Aseles found herself in a house, looking much like the living room with one grandfather clock, a shiny couch, a few tables and lamps, and a large rug at the center of the room. Almost immediately at their arrival, a gaping black orb appeared in the center of the room, a rough wind pulling in the furniture from their positions and into its black abyss.

"So much for a happy welcome!" Sora shouted, pressing his palms against the wall as Aseles shot herself beside a shelf that was hammered into the wall. Donald and Goofy pressed themselves against the ground as the chairs, sofas, tables and knickknacks of the room began to spin around and around like a tornado, sucked into the vortex of darkness. Aseles looked over to the exit of the room past her flipping hair, seeing the king waving his arms around again, terrified. Aseles could only take a guess of this place: it was HIS house. Hey, if Aseles saw her furniture flying around the house, she would be pretty shocked too.

"Come on!" Sora stated as he let go of the wall, calling out his keyblade. As predicted, Heartless appeared in the room, beginning to run around and knocking down what was left standing. The rest followed Sora's action and charged, striking against them and trying to protect what furniture was left at the same time.

As the Heartless diminished from their numbers, the group began to strike against the wild vortex, minimizing its deadly whirlpool. As Sora finally managed to defeat the last Heartless, all mayhem stopped, the furniture falling down where it landed.

"I feel kind of funny," Donald whispered. Aseles turned, but she had to bite down on her tongue as her cheeks puffed up. Sora clamped his mouth against his mouth as Goofy's line of mouth began to wiggle, trying desperately not to laugh out loud. All of Donald's feathers had puffed up, and he appeared very much like a dry-cleaned poodle with a large nose.

"Whoa!" Sora felt his hand tugged as Aseles turned, seeing the king shake his hand, wave goodbye, and then disappear behind the exit of the room.

"There," Donald had fixed his feathers and headed to the last, floating window. The other three



headed to it and stood before it while Donald pulled the string, playing the last clip.

*“Listen well. On the other side of this portal, they’re about to begin construction on that wretched castle. But until then, their treasured Cornerstone of Light lies unguarded, with all of its power still contained!” Maleficent said.*

*“The Cornerstone.....of Light?” Pete said. “*

*Yes! That cursed sphere is the very thing that prevents us from entering the castle,” Maleficent growled slightly.*

*“Oh”*

*“You know what must be done?”*

*“Uh...”*

*“Go then. Time to prove your worth! And don’t dare to fail me again!” Maleficent said she began to stride away.*

*“Don’t fail her again.....let’s see.....That’s it! I just gotta smash that Cornerstone to smithereens!” Pete punched his fist into his free hand. He then began to head toward the door, and finally the view of the area changed, completely showing a grinning Pete, “But first.....I gotta get my old boat back.”*

“...Oh no,” Sora dashed as Aseles, Donald and Goofy immediately followed behind him. He leapt through the window as Aseles was next in line, staggering on her feet on the dirt floor.

"It was Pete!" Sora stated angrily.

"Look!" Goofy pointed forward. The group looked up to see Pete that was seen in the clip, seeing him heading to the Pier.

"Hey!" Donald yelled as Pete gave a look around and laughed, running down the hill and disappearing out of sight.

"The Cornerstone is gone!" Goofy shouted. Aseles launched her head to the side, and her mouth dropped. It was gone, leaving nothing but the base of the boxes of where it once stood.

“Aseles!” Sora cried, but she was already in a run, rushing past under the sign of the Pier and into the small pathway appearing near the riverbank. She looked forward, seeing Pete, and...present Pete? She narrowed her eyes at them, but came to the realization that she was indeed in the past, and there was two now. Near the river bank, it was a small boat, and it was carrying the Cornerstone.

“What gives you the right to take me steamboat?!” past Pete argued back.

“Listen pipsqueak, if it weren’t for me, you wouldn’t be-”

“Take this!!” Aseles ran forward, swinging her keyblade powerfully against present Pete. She sent him flying backwards, his back hitting the rock wall nearby.

"Hey, what's the big idea?!" Pete said, shaking a fist and getting up.

"Stopping you!" Aseles yelled out as she stood in front of the steamboat, past Pete standing beside her with the Cornerstone locked in a crate. It was attached to the steamboat by a hook, making it

float above the river's surface with a tough rope holding it in place.

"Hey, outta my way!" Pete said throwing a ball that had shining lights on it. Aseles backed away a bit, but her mouth dropped when she saw Past Pete suddenly picking it up.

"What the--"

"No, don't!" The beeping of the small bomb accelerated as a huge explosion threw Aseles off her feet, the smoke blurring her vision instantly as she coughed roughly. Her lungs burned as she gasped for clean air, hearing a thud behind her.

"H-Hey!" Aseles's body was lifted from the ground, the collar of her shirt gripped tightly and wringing around her neck. The smoke cleared, seeing herself in evil Pete's grip. He made a fist as he pushed forward, but Aseles quickly blocked it with the neck of her flashing keyblade. She swung her body away as he missed the next punch, and tried again, but only to have Aseles block it once more.

He grew frustrated, "Won't you hold still!?"

"You think I'm an idiot?!" Aseles yelled back, struggling in his grasp.

"Hey, put her down!" Donald yelled with Sora, Goofy, and past Pete behind him. Past Pete then came running toward Pete. Present Pete made a fist and hit past Pete powerfully, sending him flying up into the sky, making him land behind the trio.

"I have no time for this!" Pete yelled and swung his grip on Aseles. Aseles gasped as she flew overhead, and the next moment she felt the cold sensation of water hit her body. He had thrown her into the river, and she fell with a splash of rushing bubbles around her face. She blinked rapidly as she kicked toward the surface, coughing but seemed to be struggling to stay on the surface.

"Can't, see!" Aseles coughed to herself, and found herself falling into the water again as she took a deep breath of air. She ducked down as she looked forward, adjusting her eyesight and seeing that the boat was now moving...and she knew for a fact that it wasn't Past Pete driving it. She narrowed her eyes as she began to kick forward, swinging her arms forward as she began to propel herself toward the moving boat. She finally made it to the edge, throwing her head up out of the water and coughed onto the wooden surface of the boat. She began to heave herself upon it, Pete unaware of her presence. She was finally on all fours and she stood, running up the white steps of the boat. She looked up to see Pete was throwing mocking faces at the others who stood by the edge of the river. The next moment was the most ridiculous sight: he began to shake his rear at them.

"You got to be kidding me! Maleficent depends on you to do the job!?" Aseles scoffed.

"What's that supposed to mean!" Pete asked angrily. Aseles growled and swung her arm, taking out her keyblade and charged toward Pete. He dodged, causing her to hit the wheel of the boat. The boat immediately began to spin in heavy swirls, the gray surface of the water picking up in large splashed around the edges. The side of the boat suddenly smacked against the bank of the river, next to Sora and the others.

Aseles groaned as the whole world spun wildly before her, her feet trying to find their way off the boat and climbed over Pete's back in the process. She fell backwards, caught in someone's arms. She looked up, seeing four Sora's surrounding her...and couldn't help but smile goofily at the sight.

“W-When did you all get here?” she replied.

“Aseles, snap out of it,” Sora hurriedly patted the side of her face. Aseles blinked rapidly, her vision clearing up. She stood up firmly as she gripped her head, looking about.

"Come on, let's get the Cornerstone back!" Sora said, charging toward the stronghold crate with two keyblades in his hands. Donald and Goofy were already commencing on battering it open. Aseles charged toward the crate that kept the imprisoned Cornerstone, with Sora delivering the last, powerful swoop of his weapon. On contact, a large log of the crate spun off, and just as Pete was beginning to recover, it hit him at the side of his head and threw him off the edge of the boat. He fell into the water, but rushed up for air and met the front of the boat with the side of his head.

“We saved the Cornerstone,” Sora sighed happily as Donald and Goofy cheered. Aseles gripped her head, groaning as Past Pete was still in a daze somewhere behind her. She looked toward the glistening light of the large orb, her eyes brimming with its reflection and righteousness.

“Uh....guys?” Donald questioned. Sora, Goofy and Aseles turned to see Pete had pulled himself out of the riverbank, and was running up a hill at the side and passing under a sign that read “Wharf”.

"Come on! We have to go catch him!" Sora stated as he led the way. The rest looked at the Cornerstone one last time, and followed right behind.

Approaching Pete’s destination, Aseles looked around to find they had arrived in some abandoned stores, another pier to her right with the river continuing to flow downstream, a hill that led to Cornerstone Hill to the far left. Her eyes caught present Pete with Past Pete once more, both standing on the pier’s boarded floor and throwing punches at each other. The group immediately intercepted, standing in front of Past Pete.

"There's nowhere to escape!" Goofy said.

"Yeah!" Donald cheered. Past Pete suddenly pushed the group aside, throwing a punch at Pete and sending him backwards. Well, his bad manners seemed to have passed on over the years.

Pete stood up, furious as he gripped his nose, "Arrrrgh!" He stood in fighting stance as the rest did the same, weapons in hands. Past Pete made the first move and charged forward to his future-self, the rest following behind and sending Pete backwards again. Pete regained his balance and stood, furious. He cackled evilly as he gripped two explosive orbs in his hands, rolling them across the dirt floor. Everyone dodged out of the way, the explosion blowing Aseles’s hair from behind. He continued to rampage his evil bowling as clouds of smoke began to appear about the place.

“Wind!” Donald yelled out. The smoke instantly cleared as Aseles turned, seeing Pete tossing his explosive across the air this time, much like a baseball.

“Batter up!” Aseles gripped her keyblade tightly and swung, making the ball slam against Pete. He groaned and fell back, the bomb resting on his abdomen.

“Oh dear,” Pete whispered as he covered his face, the explosion going off. A puff of smoke appeared around him as the rest waited. Pete coughed, his face completely shrouded in black ash. He blinked, rubbing his eyes as the rest stood ready.

“Now you’re gonna pay!” Past Pete yelled in rage as he headed toward present Pete. He sent a flying punch to Pete’s face. Evil Pete suddenly gripped the attacking fist in time, swinging him around and around. He let go with a great heave, sending his past-self rolling across the floor... and toward the four.

They all backed away hurriedly, suddenly losing balance and standing at the edge of the rushing river. Donald yelped as he fell into the river with a splash, his hands flapping to help him stay afloat. Aseles quickly leaned in as she managed to grab onto Donald's hand. The tides of the river grew stronger as she grunted, beginning to lose her grip on land and beginning to be swept away with Donald.

"Just let go!" Donald called out.

Aseles shook her head, "No! You're my friend, and I won't let you go!" Donald shot a glance to her as she looked at him through the splashing water against her face, "You might not like me around, but that doesn't mean I don't want you around!" Donald's eyes widened as Aseles grunted, jabbing her body against the wooden planks of the walkway. She gritted her teeth as she pulled back, Donald's body being pulled out of the water. She grunted with one last heave, and helped Donald onto the pier's floor, her hair flat against her wet face. Donald perked his face up, Aseles looked to see he was completely soaked with his hat drooping on his face.

"You okay, Donald?" Aseles asked, regaining her breath.\

"...Thanks...." Donald nodded quickly, swallowing as he began to squeeze the water out of his hat. He placed it back on with a splat as Aseles and him turned, seeing Past Pete was still having confrontation with his future self, Sora and Goofy trying their best to fend both of them off. Though, as Aseles and Donald joined the array of attacks, Pete's courage began to diminish as he swiftly threw everyone back, and began to run for his life.

"Oh no, you don't!" Donald yelled as the four jumped upon his back, sending him to the ground in a cloud of dust. An orchestra of loud groans and shouts stirred the air, with the four thrashing with fists, punches, kicks and magical spells toward their enemy.

Pete finally broke with a small yelp, standing up with his whole face and arms covered in bruises, "You'll pay for this you meddling twerps!!" He threw his hand up into the sky, a pair of silver doors appearing behind him in a bright flash. "This ain't ov- OWEE! My back!" Pete groaned, falling through the doors as they slammed shut behind him.

"Hurry, Sora!" Donald stated quickly.

"Oh right!" Sora hurried as he stood in front of the doors, pointing his keyblade in front of it. A beam of light shot from its tip, locking the doors with a quick snap, and resulting them to glow brightly, and disappear into twinkles. After giving each other glances, the group hurried to help Past Pete to his feet.

"Wow.....Thanks for getting that pipsqueak! Say, who was that big buffoon guy?" Pete asked.

Sora's face brightened, eager to share the reply, "That's yo-" Sora's finger shot forward to Pete, but the rest of his reply was muffled by Goofy's quick hand.

"Now Sora, it's a secret between us," Goofy smiled nervously as Donald and Aseles sighed.

"Huh? Oh well, never mind. Since you got me steamboat back, I'll let you take a spin in it!" Pete congratulated with a smile. "How about it?"

**MOMENTS LATER:**

Sora had dibbs on the wheel of the steamboat...of course. After waving bye to Pete, the boat began to take a spin downstream of the river. Goofy began to pull the whistles of the boat in excitement as Aseles giggled at the sight. She turned toward the edge of the boat, leaning against the wooden railing and looking toward the setting sun in the horizon. The Cornerstone gleamed

brightly below her, knowing that, overall, it was worth being here.

“Hey.” Aseles blinked, looking down to see Donald was leaning the railing with her, his eyes glued forward toward the horizon.

“Oh, hey Donald,” Aseles replied. “Hey....listen, there’s something I-“

“I’m sorry....Aseles,” Donald replied, cutting her off. “I shouldn’t be....rude to you all the time.”

“No...I mean, it’s fine, really,” Aseles managed, clearing her throat. “I understand....why you were uncomfortable having me around, I mean....I’m a nobody to you guys...you guys don’t know me and-“

“But I would like to get to know you better,” Donald replied. Aseles blinked to him, surprised. “I know you kind of fall back...but that doesn’t mean we look at you less, Aseles. You lost your home world, and you’re just trying to find answers.”

Aseles rubbed her hands together, “Yeah....”

“So that doesn’t mean I should stop you from doing that,” Donald smiled.

Aseles looked to him, and felt the flutter of happiness among her face, “Um...thank you, Donald....for everything.”

“Same here...plus, I think Sora needs a distraction sometimes...” Donald suddenly grinned.

Aseles’s face flushed, “...Um...distraction?”

“Hey guys.” Aseles sprang her eyes to the side, gulping to see it was a gleaming Sora. Aseles looked to Donald who was grinning widely, and merely walked away to take control of the boat. Aseles flushed redder in gray as she looked toward the horizon again, clearing her throat.

“I thought....uh...you wanted to drive the boat all the way back,” Aseles replied.

"I'm sure Donald can steer a boat," Sora smiled again.

"Right," Aseles replied, resting her wrists against the wooden railing. Sora chuckled, leaning his shoulder against hers.

“You know....this feels awfully familiar,” Sora replied, quirking his mouth to one side as he looked ahead to look at the gleaming water.

“Familiar? How?” Aseles looked over to him.

Sora looked at her at the corner of his eyes, his smile still present, “...I don’t know. It just feels....familiar. I like this feeling. It reminds me....of home.”

Aseles blinked, looked toward the Cornerstone below. There was a twinkle within her eyes as she felt something gripping at her heart, and stroking it fondly...as if...this feeling would never go away. It felt so different being here....but then again, Sora was right; this feeling, it was so familiar...and she couldn’t describe it, it was beyond her comprehension. Such a lovely feeling....it felt like.....there was nothing to worry about, that nothing existed except for this feeling. Aseles, indeed, felt like she was home.

LATER:

"Well, the Cornerstone is back in place and everything is back to normal," Goofy said.

"But while we're here..." Donald started with a grin. Sora and Donald shook their heads as Aseles smiled nervously. The two headed toward Donald, grabbing him from the arms and pulling him backwards.

"Oh! Come on!" Donald struggled as Aseles shook her head, heading toward the silver doors on Cornerstone Hill and pulling them open. Sora and Goofy then looked at each other and nodded with a huge smile.

"One...Two...Three!" they said, swinging Donald right into the exit. Goofy walked in second as Sora and Aseles walked alongside each other, exiting the world.

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The bright light faded as Aseles, Sora, Goofy appeared on the other side, seeing Donald was face flat against the marble floor of the room. The silver doors behind slammed closed and rattled slightly before the doors stood very still. Aseles stretched her arms, blinded by the assortment of colors among the room again.

"Hey, there are no more thorns!" Sora said as Aseles looked around. The room was the Cornerstone was absolutely cleared.

"Yes you did! Good job!" The four looked up to see Merlin was approaching, with Queen Minnie hurrying to stand beside him.

"Thank you so much!" Queen Minnie said happily as both Chip and Dale jumped up in jubilation on her other side. Aseles blinked as she looked past them, seeing someone was walking down the staircase at the far end of the wide room. It was a duck, wearing lavender, fancy dress with a gold crown resting at the top of her white, feathered head.

She seemed quite shy of her approach. Goofy seemed to have nudged Donald as Donald saw her at the stairway. Everyone looked at her as Donald began to make his way toward her, but then the paint of fear was stretched across his face.

"Who's she?" Sora asked.

"Donald's love life," Goofy said with a chuckle.

Sora then placed his hands behind his head, "Really?" He grinned widely as Aseles rubbed her cheek. Suddenly a yell erupted, making all of them jump in fright.

"WHERE WERE YOU? YOU FORGOT THE DATE I PLANNED FOR US?!?!?!?" the female duck exploded, her calm hands turned into fists with her face red. WOW.

"Ahhh, Daisy," Donald looked at Sora, begging for help with wide eyes, "Sora..." Sora just stood there with a smile on his face. Aseles jabbed her elbow into Sora's ribs, making him cringe as he shot his arms down.

He gave her a look, but he sighed and rolled his eyes, "Fine..." He walked forward toward Donald and Daisy, clearing his throat as he slightly hunched forward to look at her face to face properly, "Daisy, we need to have Donald for a little while....longer."

"HOW LONG?!?" Daisy asked, making Sora jump in place.

"Just a little, while longer," Sora said again, recovering from her yell.

"Promise you'll bring him back?" Daisy asked. The way she said "promise" almost made Aseles nervous, especially with the hint of lonesome in her voice.

"Promise." She made a smile at Sora in agreement.

"Okay," she said as she headed toward Donald again and marching her way to him, making him walk backwards, "You sure you will come back no matter what?!?!"

"Of course," Donald said with a nervous laugh.

"And when you come back, you have to spend time with me, go on picnics, and all of the things I'll think of!" she said. Donald's eyes looked over at the silver doors at the end, suddenly grinning.

"Donald!!" Merlin said, wagging his finger at the duck.

"Hehehehe..." Donald chuckled as he ran off from being hugged by Daisy.

Daisy almost tripped as she regained her balance, running toward Donald, "WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING!?" Donald passed the silver doors, running around in circles around the Cornerstone and tripping, trying to get away from Daisy that was right behind. Sora chuckled behind his fist as Goofy and Aseles smiled nervously.

Though the moment was interrupted with a bright beam of light radiated from the Cornerstone and shooting up toward the ceiling. The beam made a flash as it revealed a shining keyhole. Sora lifted his keyblade in hand, letting the tip of it shoot a beam at the keyhole, and then approached the sound of something locking in place.

"It's time for us to leave," Sora replied.

"Be sure to be safe on your journey," Minnie bowed her head. "Thank you, for everything."

"Of course." Sora, Goofy, Aseles, and a reappearing Donald stood before her, bowing their heads down.

"Will you come back?" Daisy asked Donald. Donald nodded with a wide smile, and giving Daisy a hug and a peck on the cheek.

"AWW!" the three friends chimed with Goofy nudging Sora's arm.

"Stop...." Donald darted his eyes to the three, blushing red with stern eyes.

"It's too cute," Aseles giggled.

"Hope to see you again!" the little chipmunks hopped in place.

"Do good lads and lady!" Merlin said, giving a goodbye wave.

"Your Majesty, will you please tell the king I need to see him?" Sora inquired toward Minnie. Aseles felt her lifting spirits suddenly turn cold, her arms hugging her abdomen tightly.

The queen nodded, "Absolutely," she responded with a smile. Briefly she turned her direction to Aseles, and Aseles quickly looked away, avoiding anyone's gaze. Sora, Donald, Goofy, and Aseles waved goodbye one last time and began to walk up the stairs from the Cornerstone, and began to make their way to the Hanger.

FFW:

Aseles's eyes continued to avert among the stars in front of her while still able to hear the others who snored softly in their deep slumber. She was so sure Donald was dreaming about Daisy, she just knew it.

As much as she needed to sleep, it was the only way Aseles could wrap her mind around what had happened so far. It seemed Sora did want to speak with the King about something....but Aseles was so curious on what it was. It seemed these three had a special connection with him...and for Aseles to keep such a secret away from their knowledge, she almost felt like she was betraying their trust. As her eyes flickered closed, she knew she was sleeping, though the sleep did not last long.

Aseles's eyes flickered, and she rubbed them with a grim line running along her mouth. She suddenly fell out of her seat after unbuckling her belt. She groaned in pain as she gritted her teeth, slamming her back against the bottom side of her chair. The feeling was immense, crawling all over her skin like droplets of poison in her veins, stinging and hot.

"Ow..." she began to feel a massive headache from behind. A vision suddenly arose....how she wished for sleep.

*Aseles sat up, finding herself in a big and humongous cell. But...where?*

*She stood as she looked about the lavender, prison bars, feeling the cool shade of the area beginning to consume her, almost as if she didn't exist. She had to escape from here....she didn't belong here*

*There was a moan, and Aseles slowly turned, her blurring vision seeing a body was lying on the floor. She hurried over, the splash of red hair laying against the ground. She wore somewhat of a pink outfit, but Aseles's vision was not clearing, unable to identify who this person was. .*

*"Hey," Aseles gripped onto her shoulder, and shook her body softly. "Are you awake?" She didn't move. "Kairi?" Aseles unexpectedly asked.*

*"Can you feel....Sora?"*

*Aseles froze as the girl's feet began to kick slightly. Suddenly a mountain of a presence tumbled onto Aseles as she fell to the ground, feeling her head screaming. She grunted as he picked up her head, but saw that the red-haired girl was gone. Someone....was behind her.*

*Aseles slowly turned, and her eyes widened in horror to see a person in a black cloak was standing right above her, their face shrouded in the darkness of their hood.*



## Greater Threats

*Aseles scrambled to her feet, walking backwards, her whole frame completely rigid and the bottom of her stomach churning violently; that...was Kairi.*

*"Oh, you know her too huh?" Aseles gulped, knowing full well it was not someone she knew...or.....the one person she did not want to run into.*

*"No, guess again," the voice said playfully, but the way he said it could not be good news. "You know....you remind me of someone I was supposed to kill, Aseles."*

*"Where is Kairi!? How do you know my name?!" Aseles shouted angrily.*

*"Don't you remember? Boy...you're worse than....."*

*Aseles looked at him oddly, "I don't know who you are..."*

*"That's too bad, because then I really DO have to kill you," the member replied. Oh crap...no way.*

*Aseles gritted her teeth, swinging her arm out...but to her utter misfortune, the keyblade was not arriving. Aseles's eyes widened and she swung her arm again, clenching her fingers into a tight fist of snow. She retracted her fingers open again, but nothing happened.*

*Aseles's eyes abruptly had to look up, because the member was now in directly in front of her, looming over her with his eyes glistening underneath the shadow of his hood.*

*"Boo." Aseles scrambled back, losing her footing as she plummeted to the ground harshly, wincing as she landed on her right arm with her pelvis twisted. "Little jumpy, aren't you?"*

*"Who are you!?! " Aseles mustered to shout with her heart throbbing in her throat, her legs trembling as she stood up again. The Organization member began to make long strides toward her as Aseles backed up a few steps. Finally the man stopped, and Aseles saw him reach up to the top of his hood, and yank his concealment back. Immediately, a river of red hair shot back on his head, with his aqua eyes glistening to stare at Aseles. The upper part of his eyes darkened, with a large, sinister smirk playing at the edges o of his lips. His smile was consisted of pearly whites, making a cold sensation sprint down her spine.*

*"The name's Axel, got it memorized?" he jabbed one gloved finger toward his temple, and tapped it gently. Aseles felt the world buzz uncontrollably as he threw arms out at his sides. There was suddenly a burst of flames, and Aseles did not wait to see what he would do. She darted to the side, but what she didn't expect was a large, flaming shuriken cutting her off. She stumbled back once more, clinging onto the back wall of the room. She looked over to him, inspecting the two circular weapons in his palms, each having a series of iron spikes along the edges. They began to scorch in flames again.*

*"What do you want?" Aseles shot out, feeling completely defenseless against his person. One strike is all it would take....but would she really die?*

*"I have orders to see if the subject is willing to comply. If not...well....you can guess how this is going to end."*

*"Whatever...what that Xaldin wants, he can forget it! I will never betray my friends for the likes of you!" Aseles stated coldly.*

*"It's not what Xaldin wants..." Axel suddenly began to take long strides toward Aseles, and she quickly maneuvered to the side. In an instant, her shoulder was pinned to the wall by one of Axel's weapons, the iron spike twisting the top of her shirt and wrapping itself around her neck. Aseles struggled, but her other wrist was pinned by the second weapon. Her eyes looked up, with Axel leveling his face down to look at her properly.*

*"It's what you can serve....to the whole group," Axel replied firmly, his eyes cold as ice.*

*"I have nothing to offer!" Aseles spat back. She whimpered, her face grabbed as Axel straightened up, and yanked her neck up. She was now bending her neck forward, her eyes forcefully looking up to Axel as he looked down at her, a firm line across his lips.*

*"We are missing a wielder of our own.....but there is an open position, just for you."*

*"Let go!" Aseles whined.*

*"Or you'll do what?" Axel sneered. Aseles gulped rather loudly, and Axel grinned, "That's what I tho- OW! UGH!" Axel fell back as he gripped onto his lower abdomen, his heaves bitten back as Aseles was quick to slip out of the opening of the weapon. She made a leap over Axel as he threw his arm out to grab her ankle, but missed. Aseles staggered and gripped onto the bars of the prison she was kept in, rattling the large slabs of metal, but to no use.*

*"You- DO have some fight in you! Clever girl!" Axel chuckled as Aseles banged against the bars of the prison. She threw her arm through an opening, trying to push herself out forcefully. She could hear Axel beginning to stand up, his footsteps quick.*

*"I'm just dreaming, I'm just dreaming!" Aseles hoarsely whispered to herself, her hair wild about her face. "Wake up, wake up! WAKE UP!" Aseles shot her eyes behind her, her mouth opening widely as she saw Axel running right toward her.*

**WAKE UP!**

Aseles's eyes bolted open, her chest heaving as she looked about the cockpit. Wait...she was in the cockpit!

Aseles breathed heavily as she shot up to sit up, her empty chair to her right. She looked around the ceiling, and then turned around to look behind her, seeing Sora, Donald and Goofy sound asleep. She....was just dreaming.

Aseles made herself comfortable on the floor, as best as she could as she rested her back against the side of her chair. She rubbed her face roughly with her elbows prompted on her bent knees. However, that feeling of isolation was insane...and Aseles clutched her hair with tight fingers. How was it possible.....to dream something as that? It was....so real....and yet..... What was its purpose? Why would she dream of someone like that without even knowing who they were, or more for the fact that she had never met him in her entire life.....did she?

Aseles shook her head, groaning to herself.

*Why do you continue to have a traitor among your group?*

Aseles's head spun, and she gritted her teeth, feeling the sweat dripping down her forehead.

*Don't you see, she is tricking you.*

Aseles quickly peered over the arm of her chair, seeing Sora was beginning to wake up. He stretched in his seat, but Aseles did not bother to get up...because she knew she couldn't. Maybe if

she stayed....really quiet, Sora wouldn't-

"Aseles?" DAMN IT.

Aseles slammed her hands to her face, hunching her face forward. Sora's footsteps came rushing after the buckle of the belt was released. He kneeled down to be beside her, his hand gripping onto her shoulder.

"Aseles, what's wrong?!" he whispered.

Aseles gulped, but she shook her head, "Nothing...I just had a bad dream--"

"Aseles, look at me." Aseles felt her heart sink to the deepest parts of her stomach, but she slowly released her face and peered up to Sora past her hanging bangs.

Sora's eyes widened, "Aseles....why are you so pale? What did you dream about?"

"...I really don't want to talk about it," Aseles replied honestly.

Sora frowned, "Mind if I sit down then?" Aseles blinked to him, but looked away hurriedly as she scooted a bit to the side, leaving Sora some space to lean his back against the side of her chair as well. Her eyes looked to the ground as Sora looked ahead, his hands resting on his bent knees.

He looked over to her, "You know you can talk to me...right?"

Aseles stayed firm on the spot, "Yes...I know."

"Whatever your dream was....it was just a dream, alright? Nothing can hurt you there," Sora replied. Aseles nodded briefly. "But you don't believe me." Aseles slowly picked up her head, looking to Sora from the corner of her eyes. "That look on your face....it's like that day, when Xaldin tried to take you."

Aseles's face color paled further, her pupils shrinking at the sound of his name.

*She is of no value to you, but to us....she is of our kind.*

"What is.....wrong with me?!" Aseles whispered dreadfully, shooting her eyes down and away from Sora's glance. She clamped her hands to her face again, "I'm so confused....what is wrong with me?"

"Aseles, nothing is wrong with you," Sora slithered his arm around her shoulders, embracing her tightly.

Aseles shook her head, the corner of her eyes welling up, "I don't know what to do....I don't know where to go."

"You don't have to go anywhere!" Sora urgently cut in. He pressed the side of his head against hers, holding out his left hand out in front of her. Aseles looked to it, seeing his curling fingers expanding gently, "See my hand?"

Aseles sniffed, "Mhmm..."

"We're like fingers.....we're all different, but we all share the same place, the same purpose. The hand ties them all together, and they all depend on one another to hold on, to grip onto something. You are part of our hand...."

Aseles looked to the side, staring at Sora as he smiled widely to her, "Sora..."

"You belong here, with us, with Donald and Goofy, Leon and Yuffie, and the rest of the Hollow Bastion Committee," Sora replied. "Why do you continue to dampen your spirits, Aseles? I mean...I know this might sound mean...but there is nothing left to chase. There are new threats in line...and it's important to get rid of those first. If you believe Organization XIII is up to get you with something....then it's best to stop them before anyone else is dragged into their plans."

"...Okay," Aseles replied, rubbing off the corners of her eyes. She sniffed once last time, her eyes slightly pink, "Thank you, Sora."

Sora smiled, giving her a tight squeeze around her shoulders, "You're welcome." Aseles picked up her head more, catching Sora's face directly in front of hers. Her smile faded as so did his, and two staring at each other deeply into each other's orbs of sky.

Aseles's eyes flickered as Sora began to slowly retreat his arm back, his fingers sliding across her back and off.

BEEP. BEEP.

Aseles and Sora quickly broke off the trance, standing up as Sora began to head his way toward the control panel, clicking some buttons. He looked out the window as Aseles's eyes followed his gaze, seeing there was something approaching.

"Hey, Donald," Sora walked back, tapping the duck's beak up and down. Donald snorted as Aseles bit on her tongue again, suppressing her laugh when she saw him flail in his seat.

"W-What is it, Sora?" Donald mumbled, rubbing his eye. Next, Goofy was yawning as she smacked his lips, looking around the area groggily as he tried to open his eyes.

"We're approaching the next world...and we're going to need your magic," Sora replied.

"For what...?" Donald mumbled.

"It's Atlantica," Sora replied.

Immediately Donald's eyes shot open, his back straightening as he coughed to clear his throat, "Hang on guys!" Aseles hurried over to her seat as she buckled herself in, gripping onto the arms of the chair. Sora seated himself in as Goofy began to wake himself up more successfully. Donald in the other hand was already wide awake as he pulled the handles of the steering wheel toward him. The gummi ship suddenly leveled back as Aseles glued herself to her chair, the blue atmosphere of the world approaching rather more quickly than she had anticipated. There was a cold sensation, and Aseles shut her eyes from the sudden overwhelming feeling.

There was a dark formation of light around Aseles's eyes, so dark that she could not see her hand in front of her face. She looked about, but could not drink in the solitude as a bubbling sensation began to overpower her body. Aseles grunted as she tried to pull away, but the spell of this mysterious power was too harsh, and she found her body rocketing forward, flying through the air. There was a loud wisp of bright light, and Aseles could now see herself spinning uncontrollably. She waved her arms in front of her, expecting herself to fall down but...she didn't. Was she hovering in midair?

Aseles looked about, and found that her hair had been loosened. She reached up to grab it, but what she felt was the silky strands of her hair moving freely, almost like they were in the water. Her eyes averted around, and she gasped to find that she was...in a coral reef? How could this be?

"Whee!" Aseles shot her face around, her hair flowing along her face as she swatted it out of the way, seeing Goofy rolling by....in a turtle shell. Goofy was a turtle. What the heck was this?

Before Aseles could ultimately freak out, she caught a glimpse of Sora and Donald's face, but when her vision adjusted to properly look at them, she almost screamed. Almost.

Donald's lower body had taken the shape of an octopus, blue as the clearest water. He crossed his arms on his chest, looking to Goofy was continued to spin in the water, doing flips.

"C'mon Donald, you gotta try this!" Goofy cheered.

He passed by Sora who laughed, "Seems like fun, don't you think so Donald?"

Donald mumbled, but Aseles paid no attention to what that duck said because her eyes were glued onto the bare chested Sora. This dude...had no clothes on, none whatsoever, with nothing but a shark fin, deep as the navy blue shirt that he had lent to her. A clear set of fins circled around the base of his lower stomach, and Aseles almost squealed from the shock of it. She felt her cheeks turn bright red, slapping her hair to her face to cover her eyes from astonishing view.

But...wait...if they transformed. Oh dear, no. NO.

Regrettably, Aseles looked past her strands of brown hair, looking down upon herself to see that she had nothing one but red shells covering her breasts as a top. Her lower body had also taken its own transformation, and she turned bright red, the reddest radish she could ever think of. Her fin was a lovely yellow, with green tinting gradually at the end of her fin. Oh the nudity of this world....why?

"Huh, haven't been here for a while," Sora looked about, quirking his mouth to one side. Aseles kept in her position, feeling a starfish had been pinned to the top of her ear, keeping most of her messy hair in place.

"Where are we?" Aseles managed to reply, her face still shielded by her hair.

"Don't be shy Aseles," Goofy suddenly approached from beside.

Aseles jumped in place, looking at him as she gritted her teeth, "S-Shy?? SHY OF WHAT?"

Goofy chuckled as Aseles looked toward Donald and Sora, Donald with a very smug expression plastered on his face. Aseles's eyes met Sora's....and how she just wanted to crawl under a rock. Sora's blue, bright eyes were glittering, looking to her as Aseles felt her body boiling in the water. His cheeks flashed a bright pink as he cleared his throat, looking away with his fingers running through his hair.

"Shy that you can't swim," Goofy spun horizontally to float in front of her.

"...O-OH! Right...I'm shy...because of.....that....." Aseles gulped, smacking her forehead.

"Hey there! Sora, Donald, Goofy!" Aseles looked past Goofy to see a young red-haired mermaid approaching. Her vivid eyes scanned the group as her pure-green fishtail propelled her easily forward. Next to her was a yellow fish with blue stripes, somewhat timid of approaching as he hid underneath her hair. There was also a crab swimming from the distance, coming to her other side, trying to catch his breath.

"Ariel! Flounder! Sebastian!" Sora, Donald and Goofy proclaimed as Aseles floated there, still trying her best not to gawk at Sora.

"Long time no see!" said the fish, circling around the three.

"Who's this?" the mermaid asked as she began to approach Aseles.

"UH...UM, Aseles," Aseles replied, her face still shielded.

"Aw, don't tell me she's shy...." Ariel giggled, looking over to Sora. Once again, Goofy and Donald quirked their mouths to one side, looking at Sora who stood in between them. Sora's face flushed again, his arms crossing on his chest.

"Shy of....." he began.

"Swimming of course!" Ariel giggled. Aseles hunched her head down, groaning. She just...wanted to disappear. Ariel's hand appeared in front of Aseles, and she took it hesitantly, "No need to be shy, I'll teach you. My name is Ariel, this is Flounder, and Sebastian," she replied with a warm smile.

"Oh no, gurl, Imma teach her how to swim," the one named Sebastian approached.

Aseles nodded as Ariel smiled, heading toward the group of three, "You'll want to get tips...since you haven't been here for a while."

"Oh...right," Sora cleared his throat again, pushing himself forward. Sebastian waited as Sora stood beside Donald with Goofy beside Aseles, though both Aseles and Sora were standing right beside each other. Aseles avoided his gaze as she cleared her throat.

It was a while until Aseles was properly upright, but then she was able to float steadily and firm. As practices, he made the group try to keep up with Flounder, and...it was really difficult to Aseles's amazement. After a few....unforgivably bumps into Sora, Aseles finally got the hang of it, and was now able to swim a bit faster.

"This is really cool! I can't believe you guys have been here before," Aseles smiled widely as she dove downwards toward the bottom of the reef. Her eyes looked upwards, and she gasped in amazement. The surface of the water beautifully glistened, with the rays of the sun hitting against the colored corals and plants among the rock walls and floor. This was beyond her imagination.

"We're doing musicals by the way," Flounder replied as Aseles began to approach the group again, standing in between Donald and Sebastian.

"Musicals?" Donald asked confused.

"Yeah, would you like to join?" Ariel added, both of her hands held together in front of her.

"Sure," Sora said as Donald and Goofy also agreed.

"WAIT...." Aseles shot her arm up. Everyone looked to her....and she blushed greatly, "I....can't sing."

"Of course you can-"

"No...I really can't," Aseles cringed. "The last time I sang...I made a little girl cry." Sora, and Donald suddenly burst out laughing as Aseles dropped her stare, cringing.

"Aw, it's okay, Aseles," Goofy came beside, patting her arm with a flipper.

"You should think about it, just in case," Ariel replied. Aseles sighed, knowing her vocal chords seemed to be disagreeing already.

"Come on!" Ariel said as she began to lead the way. The group began to follow her as Aseles kept up steadily, and continued to be surprised as they approached the underwater utopia a few

miles off. Jeez, what did this place NOT have?

There was a whole population of mermaids and mermen, most of them of young age with others seemed to be in their late sixties, and they were still kicking. There was a whole row of made houses, made out of columns and shells with pillars stacked up to lead the way toward the main center of the area. Aseles was certainly not expecting this. It wasn't long before the group entered a long archway and the hallway that followed it, looking much like the entrance of a mansion. Up ahead, a throne was perched, with a man already sitting in it.

As Aseles approached, she began to piece the fact that he seemed to be ruler of this utopia, holding a golden crown on top of his long, white hair. He had bright blue eyes, a white mustache and had muscled arms. He held a golden trident in his buff fingers with two golden steel wristbands around his wrists. He also had a long and firm turquoise tail that floated leisurely among the water.

"Sitting in front of you is the mighty King Triton," Sebastian whispered in Aseles's ear, then hurried forward to keep up with the others.

"Hi daddy!" Ariel approached with a large smile. Holy....Ariel was a princess? "Look who just arrived!" The King then stood from his throne and swam in front of Sora, Donald, Goofy and Aseles. Intimidating much? Especially with that large fork in his hand.

"Good to see you once again," he smiled warmly to them. However, his eyes landed on Aseles, and he motioned over to stand in front of her, easily towering her in height. "Who's this?" Oh great....here it comes.

"A-Aseles," Aseles managed nervously with a hurried nod.

"It's very nice to meet you young lady, and its welcoming to see the three of you here again. However I must assure you, there have been no Heartless here at all." So he already knew about the Heartless, and the fact that none of them belonged here.

"No Heartless at all?" Sora asked dumfounded.

"No Heartless, so no use for that key," Triton responded again, almost bitterly.

"That's good, no problems here then," Sora added. Triton nodded again. "But we might want to stick around a little bit more, you know, for the concerts."

"Of course, you're welcome here," Triton replied with a large smile, "Which reminds me...shouldn't you be practicing, Ariel?"

"Hm....oh! Right, sorry daddy. C'mon, I have the perfect spot!" Ariel motioned with an eager hand. Sora hurriedly followed behind her as Aseles swam in between Donald and Goofy with Sebastian and Flounder trying to catch up to the two head.

The waters had grown murky and dark after leaving the utopia, but Aseles's eyes seemed to adjust amazingly underneath the cool temperature of the sea. It was insisted that everyone would swim along the surface much later in the day.

As the practices began to commence, Aseles was quick to move out of the way, and perched herself onto a rock with her hands smoothing out the lap of her fin. She watched Sora and the others rehearsing their lyrics and notes, surprised that they were able to keep up, though it was duly noted that Donald not try to sing Ariel's notes. Ariel pretty much sang like a beautiful harp, fitting the group in perfectly as Sebastian began to show the group all the songs he had written so far with Flounder assisting him.

"Alright, practice is ova," Sebastian replied.

Aseles coughed herself awake as she sat up, rubbing her eyes with her knuckles. She had fallen asleep, but for how long, she wasn't sure, but enough for the water to have grown completely dark and dim in light. As she adjusted her vision, she caught Sora approaching her with a large smile on his face. Aseles could feel her face grow hot. Suddenly a darkened, large shadow hovered over the two as they both looked upward, seeing something very big floating on the surface of the water.

"What's that?" Ariel said, immediately heading toward it with no hesitation.

"Ariel!" Sebastian called out. Sora quickly followed behind her as Aseles copied.

The night sky was loomed with stars as she broke the surface, the water sliding down her wet hair and shoulders. Aseles looked to Ariel's direction who kept her eyes on the ship sailing, many men dancing and cheering on the deck. Soon Donald and Goofy followed suite of breaking the surface with Flounder and a gasping Sebastian pulling out as well. There was a shooting of fireworks ringing in the air, filling everyone's face with bright colors of yellow, red, blue and green.

"Jumping jellyfish!" Sebastian held his face with his red hooks.

"That's beautiful," Aseles smiled.

"Let's get a closer look!" Ariel said, swimming toward the ship in lightning speed.

"Ariel, wait up!" Sora called out.

"Sora!" Donald and Goofy called out as his trio began to take heed behind him. Flounder followed right behind with Sebastian grabbing on his tail for assistance. Aseles almost shouted to Ariel as she saw him beginning to climb up the side of the ship, perching herself to sit on a board just beneath the edge of the deck. This probably wasn't her first time doing this....

"What do we do?" Donald asked.

"If you want to knock her down..." Sora raised a brow.

"You do realize this is a princess you're going to knock down, right?" Aseles raised a brow.

"Exactly," Sora laced his hands behind his head. "Nice fireworks though."

"We have to get her down!" Sebastian argued.

"She's fine there...and she's with a friend, see?" Sora pointed to the approaching seagull standing on her lap.

"That bird brain....is on me last nerve," Sebastian huffed, grumbling.

"Um, is she not allowed...up here?" Aseles questioned.

Sebastian shook his head, crossing his hooked arms, "Triton had forbidden Ariel to explore the human world."

"But....why...I mean, that's what Sora and the others do."

"It's a long story," Flounder replied.



"Why doesn't Triton like the human world?" Aseles persisted, her eyes narrowing.

"He has a completely different mindset child. He only wishes what's best for Ariel," Sebastian began.

"But--"

"Since you're asking," Sora came into view, the red and blue lights reflecting in his hair when Aseles turned to look at him, "Triton doesn't....really like keyblade wielders. When we first arrived here...he thought the keyblade only brought ruin to places, but we couldn't blame him either."

"But why?" Aseles's mouth dropped. "If he sees that we're different, why can't Ariel go visit some other world?"

"Because it's against the rules," Donald came next, crossing his eyes.

"Against the rules?" Aseles questioned. "Whose rules?"

"It's World Law. We cannot meddle into the affairs of other worlds," Donald replied.

"Oh...." Aseles blinked. "Then...I can see why he wouldn't let her leave, but the land is connected to the ocean floor....how can she *not* be curious?"

"That's always the problem," Sebastian sighed loudly. Aseles looked up toward Ariel's direction, seeing she was giggling and clapping her hands along with the music the men on deck were playing. Aseles frowned, unsure why Triton would think such things...but perhaps he had lived his own experience to state something such as that. Ariel...reminded her of Sora, in a sense. They wanted to go out there...and see what was up, see what they were missing-

Abruptly the sound of rumbling, deadly clouds rung above as the bolt of fast lightning struck. The winds below as Aseles's hair flapped around her face, her hands covering her ears from the treacherous sound. Her eyes shot up to see lightning strike the crow's nest of the huge ship, sending it on immediate flames.

"Ariel!" Sora and Sebastian called out as the wind started to pick up even more roughly, carrying the seagull away, calling Ariel's name as it gushed out of view. Aseles saw Ariel trying to hold onto the ship's side, the rest in hot pursuit of the ship's stern. It wasn't long before the ship rocked furiously, sending Ariel off and slamming into the water. Sora took the lead as Aseles followed, with Donald, Goofy, Flounder and Sebastian unable to catch up.

"Ariel, you alright?" Sora asked, finally reaching toward her as he helped her up.

"Yeah, but-" she shot her eyes to the flaming, crackling ship. Aseles's face paled as one man seemed to be stuck on the edge of the ship, his body disappear behind a pile of large wood. Before Aseles could guess that he was stuck, in his arms he carried a large, fluffy dog in hand, hurrying to the edge of the railing toward the lifeboat that had rested along the side of the ship.

"Hold on, Max!" he cried out. Suddenly the man toppled down as the dog flew out of his arms, a large splash indicating the dog's body hit the water. The men hauled in the canine as the man above on the ship was struggling to stand, trying to pull his foot from being lodged on the deck. No way! Get out get out!

"Eric!" one of the men cried out. In a flash of a second, the whole ship burst into loud flames, exploding in smoke and poisoning the sky. Ariel gasped in fright as she quickly began to make

her way toward the wreckage.

"Ariel!" Aseles cried out as she followed behind, Sora in hot pursuit. The wreckage was nothing but scraps of wood and rope, and Ariel was now out of sight.

"Where is she?" Sora asked, looking around.

"I don't know," Aseles responded nervously, her eyes frantic to find her. "Wait, she's right there!" Ariel was dragging the man up in tow, her arms heaving the unconscious man out of the water as best as she could. Sora and Aseles swam toward her, the boat with the sailors now gone and the storm pushing its winds among the sharp, cold air. There was nothing left but the vast collection of wreck over the sea surface.

"Is he alright?" Sora asked as he went beside Ariel, Aseles taking the opposite side.

"Let's take him to shore," Ariel insisted as Sora nodded, helping her with the unconscious man in her arms.

A FEW MOMENTS LATER:

The sky had turned steadily into morning, but the sun was hidden behind some gray clouds, leaving the sky a dirty-light, blue color. The three were now on shore with the heroic man named Eric, with Ariel unhesitant to be by his side on the cool and wet sand. This man black locks were being brushed by Ariel's delicate hand, his face impeccably smooth, almost like stone. He wore battered white cotton, long-sleeved shirt; dark blue ripped dress pants, a thin red waistband, and his feet bare and cold.

"That was close," Sora exhaled. If Ariel wouldn't have gotten him on time, he would already be below the sea.

"She likes him," Aseles whispered softly, looking to Ariel and Eric.

"How do you know?" Sora asked curiously as Aseles floated among the shore, enough to have her shoulders the only part out of the water.

"Look...." Aseles replied as she tilted her head toward them. Sora looked at her, but followed. "The way she's brushing his hair....the way she's looking at him...." Aseles stopped momentarily to see the seagull from the night before approaching, making his way toward Ariel.

"Is he dead, Scuttle?" Ariel asked. Scuttle headed to one of Eric's feet, checking for a pulse it seemed as he pressed his ear against the bed of it. Aseles shook her head slowly, her eyes drawing back to the Ariel's hand brushing Eric's hair, "C'mon Sora....even you have to see it's obvious..." Aseles looked over to him, seeing his eyes redirecting themselves to Ariel's hand as well.

"I can only wonder...how this is going to work out...." Sora turned his face to look at Aseles.

Aseles stared back at him, blushing, "With Ariel being a mermaid...and Eric a human?"

Sora thought for a moment, but his eyes did not look away, "...Yeah....that." Aseles gulped as she blinked slowly, feeling Sora's eyes search her face.

"Where....were...yo u-" Aseles immediately clamped Donald's beak closed as the group of four arrived, Flounder trying to regain his breathing with Sebastian groaning to himself.

Aseles turned her gaze back to Sora, but the two immediately looked away from one another,

watching Ariel. Sebastian's mouth completely opened in shock as Ariel began to sing very sweetly, her voice blossoming that of a beautiful rose. The rest of the group stayed very silent, even Scuttle as Eric began to flicker his black eyes open, to gaze upon his rescuer. He grabbed her hand and she caressed his cheek, and Aseles couldn't help but feel this flutter among the pit of her stomach again. She suddenly stopped singing, and next followed the sounds of a dog barking loudly.

"C'mon, Ariel!" Flounder replied as Ariel began to hurriedly crawl her way across the sand. Aseles and Goofy hurried forward as they gripped her hands, quickly pulling her into the shallow water of the shore. Sora led the way behind a back of boulders, and broke the surface first as the others copied his motion.

Aseles saw it was the dog from before, the one named Max. His sopping hair flung and bounced as he dashed forward with a man appearing from a tunnel from the side, lavished with white hair and a collared shirt. He was soon assisting Eric to his feet, Eric's eyes flickering as he mumbled something. The man hooked Eric's arm around his shoulders, dragging Eric's feet across the sand. Aseles's eyes widened to see Max still lingered on the shore, sniffing out as he the group's direction, barking once then following behind the man and Eric. They were soon out of sight.

"Whew! That was close," Goofy exhaled.

"You know what we saw, I won't tell the king, you won't tell him, and let's just forget this whole thing ever happened," Sebastian said.

"How?" Flounder asked.

"The musicals of course," Sora replied.

"Are you sure we are all going to forget?" Aseles crossed her eyes. The group caught her eyes, and she tilted her head to the side where Ariel possessed a set of dreamy eyes, her eyes still lurking where Eric had lain upon.

"Fine, we'll just try...to forget it," Sebastian said with his claws across his chest.

"Come on; let's just go, Ariel's dad might be worried," Flounder said.

"Oh gosh, that's right! Come on!" Ariel said, immediately snapping out of her daydreaming and sinking below the surface, swimming quickly. The rest then followed behind.

LATER:

The excuse for Triton was rehearsing, but it seemed he still found it an unlikely story. With whatever sanity Sebastian had left, it was enough to convince Triton that they had overworked themselves and knocked out in the middle of the night. With nothing else to give him, the group quickly made their way out before Sebastian could spill the news of what they had seen and done.

Once again, Aseles was watching the group rehearse. Sora had asked you if she had thought about rehearsing with them, but she still refused. It was never in her field to sing...and to sing in front of other people?...Not likely. Maybe a swim would be good...

Aseles took one last glance at the others before she began to swim off through some plants and corals, still unbelieving of the beauty this place held, as if someone had carved them from molds of godly clay. In a matter of minutes, she found herself drifting through some caves, looking at the attractive and colorful plants and seaweed. The fish looked neat as she pursued further, though in the back of her mind she was trying to remember how to get back.

Aseles managed to grab onto a dolphin's fin as it squealed happily, swimming through tough currents, and passing through some caves and plants that tickled her skin. It then headed toward a dark cave and in she went. Though reaching the end, the area was immediately murky, and Aseles unexpectedly let go of the dolphin's fin. The animal squealed in fright, and seeing shot back to where it had entered from.

"W-Wait!" Aseles called out, but it was already gone. Aseles swallowed, but she looked upon the area, and blinked rapidly to see there was a sunken ship at the very bottom of the area. It seemed battered and torn, but still in one piece amazingly. Once again, curiosity got the best of her.

Aseles began to cautiously descend toward the sunken ship, entering it from its moldy deck, swimming down the steps and ending in the stomach of the abandoned ship. She sighed heavily; everything was too silent, it was...kind of annoying. Aseles looked among the molding wooden floor, then along the walls, but found nothing of importance, until she saw a gap beneath the staircase, covered by old barrels of gunpowder. It was big enough for someone to get into....

Aseles hurried forward as she began to heave the barrels off of the opening of the gap, able to squeeze her way into the opening. Inside was big, a majestic, blue chest sitting on the other side of the caving floor, catching her completely off-guard. It was covered in fine jewels, and sparkled deliciously in her eyes. She looked at it for a long period of time until she laid eyes upon the lock.

Aseles slowly approached it, looking at it fully around. She swung her arm out, her keyblade shining in her hand. She took a good look at it, feeling this....separation from it. She shook the thought out and aimed the head of it toward the lock. The keyblade shined brightly, and a string of red shot out, unlocking the lock in small, red electricity. It fell on the ground with a soft thud and Aseles now moved herself fully forward, opening the chest by heaving the top of it upward. The light within it shined too brightly, and she waited for it to dim, but the next thing she knew, she was sucked right into it.

*It was a dark place.*

*She looked about, her eyes wide to see the blur of images rushing around her, encircling her, making the air unable to be taken into her lungs. She gripped her throat, heaving greatly as her lungs cried out, and her hair flying among her head.*

*Traverse Town, Hollow Bastion.*

*What...was what going?*

*Sora. He stood there, and then suddenly through his eyes, Kairi fluttered into view. He smiled....*

*Her head started to hurt. The flow of visions.*

*"What is it that you're afraid of the most?"*

*Stop...no.*

*Aseles clutched her head, seething as her lungs cried out.*

*Princess...*

*Door to Darkness...*

*Keyhole...*

*Heartless...Nobodies.*

*"Why do you continue to have a traitor among your group?"*

*Heart...*

*Light....*

*.....she is of our kind.*

*Aseles felt the anguish of the abundance of information knocking against her skull. It raged against her stamina, continuing to loom and graze upon her brain, scratching and gripping. Stop, stop!*

*"It's my lucky charm, so be sure to bring it back to me!"*

*"I will, I promise."*

*"I'll come back for you, I promise!"*

*"I know you will!"*

*Aseles fell to the floor, grabbing her head and yelling, unable to contain it anymore. "STOP!!! NO MORE!!!" she pleaded.*

*\*\*\*\*\**

*"Guess who?" Aseles swiftly turned around, looking at a flash of red hair. Aseles grunted as she flew back into the air, her stomach aching and bleeding. Aseles stumbled to stand on her feet, but fell back once more. Her eyes darted to look at Axel, in his hands his Chakrams ready in hand with two of the spikes tinted at the tips of her red blood.*

*"A-Axel!" Aseles screamed at him and his face perked up with a grin. She began to stand up steadily, calling for her keyblade: it didn't come. No, not right now!*

*"It seems you left a little early last time, don't you think so? And we were just getting to know each other," Axel sighed, walking over. Aseles grunted, beginning to stand, but her front met the ground, with the bottom of Axel's boot pressing down against her back.*

*"Axel, let me go!" Aseles shouted.*

*"There's someone I want you to meet," Axel replied. Axel looked ahead as Aseles struggled, but she froze when she heard another pair of footsteps heading toward her from the other direction. She shot her eyes up, seeing a person of much average height arriving in the white room.*

*"Why don't you show the lovely Aseles...your true face?" Axel bowed his upper body down, gesturing to the person. Aseles's eyes widened as the figure began to pull their hood back, with a flash of brown hair flying out. Her eyes widened as her face swelled in shock, her mouth flying open in total fear.*

*"I am Aseles," the tanned girl in the black cloak raised her hand up, aiming it toward Aseles who was frozen underneath Axel's foot. She suddenly swung her arm, and her keyblade shot out in sight...the same one Aseles had.*

*"Mind doing the honors?" Axel questioned.*

*"My pleasure," the figure replied, lifting her keyblade up as her eyes narrowed down at Aseles. "It'll be painless.....you won't feel a thing."*

"Noooo!" Aseles screamed, something hard hitting against the back of her head. "Ow!!! Huh?" Aseles looked around; she was still in the sunken ship again, in front of the chest. No...how could this be?

Aseles shook in place, her eyes darting around worriedly, but then they spotted the empty chest in front of her. She shut it closed with a loud slam, and proceeded to bash it inside with her keyblade, easily breaking it apart. The jewels shot out at the sides of it as Aseles continued to scream, her eyes trembling in rage and horror. After there was nothing left but the scattered splinters and the bottom part of it, Aseles stopped, her hand trembling as she stared at her keyblade. She quickly let go of it, not bothering to see it vanish from view as she began to make her way back up to the opening she had entered from. She began to swim toward the dark cave she had entered from, wasting no time in sticking around.

LATER:

Aseles was able to trace back her steps with the adrenaline she had in her body, but when it died down....Aseles felt completely lost even though she knew she was going in the right direction. Leaving the group was the worst decision to make; what was happening.....was Aseles.....really a part of them? Did that explain why she couldn't remember anything beforehand? Did they erase her memories? The image of seeing her in that cloak was now haunting her.

Aseles shook the thought out, but the next bothering thought came to mind. What was...the deal with Sora? From what Aseles heard.....Sora cared very much for Kairi and.....She shook the idea off, knowing it wasn't a good idea to ponder on it. She smacked her forehead with a palm. Grr.

Aseles swam faster, but she was quickly met with a hard thump against her, a body. She looked up, her eyes immediately widening to see it was Sora. Oh no, she touched his chest. DAMN IT.

"Aseles, where were you?" he asked.

"Well, um, I was just swimming around, you know," Aseles replied, her arms tucked away behind her.

"Oh, well, why didn't you say something before you left? I turned to see you and you were gone. I told the others I was going to find you. So, really," he crossed his arms, smirking, "Where were you?"

"I told you, I was swimming around," Aseles replied flatly, avoiding his gaze.

He blinked, "...Is...something wrong?"

"It's nothing, Sora--"

"You're lying to me." Aseles picked up her head in a swift move, but immediately blushed red to see his face was hovering right over hers. "Why don't you want to tell me?"

"Why do you want to know?" Aseles cut in.

"I was...curious," Sora replied. "Aseles...something happened. What did you see? You...have the same face again."

"It's nothing," Aseles quickly shook her head.

Sora suddenly gripped her arm, holding her in place, "Aseles."

"What is it, Sora?" Aseles huffed out angrily.

Sora's mouth dropped slightly from the corners, "...Nothing." He slowly let go as Aseles felt instantly cold from the absence of his hand. Sora moved out of the way as Aseles quickly swam past him, making her way toward the others as Sora followed behind her.

## Human

"Come, you have to see!" Ariel insisted after the practice was over. "I found Eric's necklace in between some rocks. We have to get it." With no way to get out of this offer, the group unwillingly accepted to aid her out, quite surprised that she had remembered such a small detail as a necklace.

Sora, Donald, Goofy, Aseles and Ariel swam to the surface of the sea, good miles off from Atlantica premises, approaching in front of some boulders, and sure enough a golden necklace floated in between the tight crevice and wavered gently with the sea. It held an oval shaped sphere, shining brightly by the sun's rays that were able to touch it.

"How do we get it?" Goofy asked, looking to Sora.

"I'm not sure," he responded, scratching his head. Ariel looked into the rocks and placed her hand inside, reaching for the necklace, but her arm wasn't long enough. She took her hand out, only able to admire the trinket from afar. Aseles tilted her head to have a better look inside.

"Hmmm...why don't we draw it in," Aseles suggested.

"You think?" Sora asked. He took out his keyblade, trying to poke the head of it into the rocks, but it was simply too big. Then he hit the boulders with his keyblade; no use.

"Hmm, what if you try magic?" Ariel asked.

"Step aside, Sora," Donald stepped up, taking out his wand with a flash and pointed the top of the mage hat inside the opening of the crevice. His eyes furrowed tightly as the electricity among the tip of the wand began to crackle within the rock surfaces lingering among the necklace. Suddenly the necklace began to move forward as the tips of the bolts began to curl around the gold chain. Further it traveled, touching the edges of the rocks where Donald rested. He called off the spell as Ariel quickly intervened, sticking her arm in and pulling out the necklace, resting it in her hands.

"OH! Thank you so much!" Ariel giggled as she slammed herself against Donald, squeezing him tightly in her arms.

"Air..." Donald coughed as he waved his arms frantically. Ariel let him go as he plopped back to the water, inhaling deeply. "You're welcome."

"Let's go to my grotto! I can put it to my collection," Ariel smiled widely.

"A grotto?" Aseles asked, raising an eyebrow.

"What are we waiting for?" Sora followed Ariel under the surface. Aseles looked to them as she pushed her face into the water, but followed behind Donald and Goofy who had taken the lead in front of her. The farther they traveled, Aseles's curiosity grew, unsure what kind of things Ariel would collect. The group passed by numerous corals and caves of the adequate waters, and came into a very open area with several species of plants and fish, all swimming away as Ariel broke through the water with Sora beside her. Aseles looked ahead to see the two were approaching a medium sized boulder near the bottom of the ocean floor, below an arch of rock.

Sora grabbed the edge of the boulder, pulling it easily toward him and moving it from the entrance that entered into a dark cave. Ariel swam in first, followed by Donald and Goofy. Aseles avoided Sora's gaze as she swam second last with Sora pulling the boulder back in towards the dark, small hallway of curving rock. The darkness was illuminated from a spring of light ahead, and when



Aseles entered into it, she was amazed of the type of grotto Ariel had. There was row of rock shelves, circulating all around and reaching upwards, giving the space the shape of a cylinder. Hundreds of forks, spoons, candle-holders, lamps, frames, cups, pots, pans, books, paintings, basically everything from the human world, were here. Talk about being fascinated about the human world...this girl...had it bad.

Sora looked about, smiling widely, "I think you collected more stuff while we were gone." Aseles turned to see him looking at a music box, winding it up to make a soft melody play within the Grotto. Goofy and Donald started to look around at the shiny jewelry Ariel had stacked among the edges of the shelves, adorning them by colors. Aseles swam up gently, looking toward the small gap at the top of the Grotto, where the light was leaking in. She spotted a small chest near the top, heading toward it as she opened the latch of it and peered inside. Her eyes sparkled to see the pearl necklaces that were way too extravagant for the common person to wear, glittering magnificently by the sun's rays. She quirked her mouth to one side and closed it gently, making her way down to view the rest of Ariel's collection, somehow amazed by the daily things Aseles would see every day. Perhaps...in the water, they looked quite different....

"This is a lot of stuff, Ariel," Aseles replied, turning her head toward Ariel as she swam down to float beside her.

"Thanks, I've been collecting things for so long. My father doesn't know though," she frowned, crossing her arms on her chest. Aseles opened her mouth, but she was suddenly yanked back by the arm. She shot her eyes to see it was Donald who did it, and suddenly she found herself huddled in a circle with Sora and Goofy, along with the just arriving Sebastian and Flounder.

"She's not really paying attention to the musicals," Flounder whispered while Sebastian, Sora, Donald and Goofy nodding. Aseles raised a brow, somewhat scowling at these....boys's lack of consideration. I mean...did they not see how *badly* she wanted to leave the water?

"Aseles, what is it? What's wrong with Ariel?" Sora replied curiously, nudging her arm.

Aseles stared at him, deadpanned, "...You're asking me? It's not obvious?"

"Well....you're a girl, so you would understand better," Sora replied...and Aseles couldn't help but scoff. They were dead serious, and boy was it a priceless thing to see.

Aseles cleared her throat and looked back at Ariel, seeing her lay on her stomach, grabbing a fork and twiddling it between her fingers. She turned back toward the group, "She obviously can't get the outside world out of her head. I think that pretty much says it all."

"No, she's always been like that...but it's getting worse," Flounder replied.

"Then maybe rescuing Eric made it worse," Aseles shrugged. "She was practically almost kissing the guy and--"

"Don't talk such nonsense!" Sebastian suddenly shot up, pointing his claw to Aseles.

"What? You know it, and you're just denying the fact!" Aseles whispered back. In the background, Ariel began to sing to herself, her voice echoing among the Grotto with such emphasis that Aseles couldn't help but shiver in place. Although, the singing was only for a brief second as she sunk back down, sitting on the rock she was once laying on, her face shrouded by her abundance of hair.

"I think Aseles is right," Goofy replied.

"Thank you, Goofy," Aseles rolled her eyes.

"Anyone got any ideas?" Flounder responded.

"We could...try to cheer her up," Goofy added in.

"Better than nothing," Sora sighed, rubbing the top of his head. "But how can we cheer her up when she just thinks of land instead of water?"

"Sing a song about being underwater," Aseles waved her hand.

"That is a brilliant idea, but you have to wait until I make the lyrics," Sebastian tapped his claws together.

"We can wait," Sora replied, "We'll keep her busy until then. How long do you think it will take?"

"HA! With my magnificent skills, I will have da lyrics done by tomorrow," Sebastian said once more, a smug expression on his red face.

"What are you guys doing?" Ariel popped out from beside Aseles. Aseles jumped as Sora cleared his throat loudly. Sebastian and Flounder immediately shut up with Donald and Goofy smiled nervously, waving their hands toward her.

"Nothing! NOTHING!" the group all chimed in.

".....Alriiiight," Ariel giggled.

#### THE NEXT DAY:

Sebastian had arrived with the lyrics needed, and it was quite surprising to see everything had been set up along with the song...which...was...very convenient. As well as the song had gone, at the end, Ariel did not seem very pleased when Aseles took one look at her. Despite being well written, the song did not give much hope to Sebastian as he had expected it to.

Once again, huddled in a circle with Sora, Donald and Goofy, Aseles couldn't help but wonder what was taking Sebastian so long to come back from visiting King Triton. She knew for a fact that Ariel and Flounder were at the Grotto, but for Sebastian to be this late on coming back...made her suspicious.

"We've got to think of a way to cheer up Ariel," Sora argued once more.

"We already tried that," Donald groaned, laying his back against the sand.

"What's taking Sebastian so long?" Goofy inquired, looking off toward the distance of the palace.

Aseles narrowed her eyes, but she pointed forward, "Look, there he is." As Sebastian drew closer, the sound of his panting attracted everyone's attention.

"Sebastian?" Sora tilted his head, the rest of the group turning. The look of panic swept across the crab's face, and his hurrying pace left Aseles tipping on the edge of something...bad. This didn't look like this was going to be good news.

"What's wrong?" Sora was the first to ask as Sebastian halted in front, trying to desperately catch his breath.

"I couldn't hold it, my mouth spilled!" he said, grabbing his forehead with both of his claws.

"What do you mean you spilled it?!" Aseles's eyes shot open with the rest, panic now stricken tenfold.

"King Triton found out!" he said again.

"How?!" Donald yelled.

"He forced me to tell him!" Sebastian yelled at once.

"Is that all?!" Aseles asked angrily.

"He told Ariel and destroyed everything in her Grotto. Now she is heading toward the sea witch!" Sebastian shook crazily. Oh crud.

"URSULA!" Sora, Donald and Goofy yelled with paled faces.

"Why?" Aseles looked toward the trio.

"Guys!!" The five turned to see Flounder was swimming frantically to their direction, "A-Ariel!! U-Ur-Ursula!"

"Why are we floating here for?!" Sora quickly intervened as he began to swim toward Flounder, "Lead the way!" Flounder nodded quickly as he began to zip through the water, Sebastian holding onto Goofy's shell as the group began to rocket across the water.

"Near the Sunken Ship, Flounder!" Sebastian called from behind. Aseles's throat lurched, her hands gripping onto her stomach at the mention of that place. Maybe it was a different ship? Oh, nope, they were going the exact same way Aseles went when she wandered off, perfect.

The group swam at full throttle, passing the plants and corals as the memory of Aseles's trip from before began to recollect itself until finally, they reached the beginning of the strong current that would lead to the dark entrance of the Sunken Ship.

"Grab on tight!" Sora yelled as everyone grabbed hands and fins. He led the way in, his fin kicking violently behind him as his hair flew back from his face.

The hands locked to each other like chains and locks as Aseles's hair flew messily behind her head. It finally seemed like Sora had reached the end of the line, and was beginning to pull people inside the cave with strong heaves until finally Aseles being last, was pulled in by Donald and Sora. They wasted no time in entering the darkness of the cave, soon finding themselves in the eerie vortex of stillness of the area. Aseles's eyes shot down to see Flounder and Sebastian had now both taken the lead, with the other four hurrying behind them. They seemed be pointing to a large crevice behind a large, broken part of a boat's stern, and when arriving, Aseles saw they were pointing to what seemed to be a large, secret switch.

"AHHH!!!" Aseles jumped from Flounder's scream, turning to see a zipping, large figure swooping from above, and a mouthful of sharp razors heading her way. She gripped the still Flounder with Sebastian glued to him. Sora, Donald, Goofy immediately split away as Aseles ducked inside a gap of the bottom of the ship, peering out to see the shark was now hovering about the area near the top, its shadows swimming along the sand.

Flounder's teeth chattered wildly as Aseles hugged him tightly to her, her body shaking vigorously from the sudden scare. Sebastian cleared his throat, and shook his head in disdain.

"We're never going to reach Ariel in time!" he quoted.

“S-Sebastian...you’re going to have to sneak....and press that button,” Aseles nodded quickly.

“What???”

“You have to; you’re the only one that can fit!” Aseles argued. “When you do, we’ll all rush inside,” Aseles replied.

“B-But by myself??”

“You’re Ariel’s last chance...” Aseles pleaded. Sebastian sighed....but he looked about the small cramped space they were in. He began to tug off a piece of a wooden plank, and placed it over himself. He looked toward Aseles and Flounder who nodded quickly. The crab sighed as he began to head out into the open of the sand, slowly walking along the sandy floor, inch by inch. Aseles and Flounder watched intently as he finally made it to the wreckage of the boat, beginning to crawl and swim his way out of sight. The rock wall near him suddenly began to rumble to life, and began move away from the entrance, but enough to have someone squeeze through.

“R-Ready, Flounder?” Aseles asked.

The yellow fish nodded, “Ready.” Aseles hugged Flounder tightly, and she shot out of her hiding place.

“Go!” Aseles called out.

“Aseles, FASTER!” Flounder shouted. Aseles looked back, but regretted it as she stared at the approaching shark heading right toward her, its jaws opening widely.

Aseles screamed as she squeezed herself inside the tight space of the opening, Flounder yelping and crying out in her grasp. Aseles’s eyes met nothing but pitch-black, but did not stop as the sound of snapping jaws followed right behind her.

The further Aseles swam, and she saw the radiating red light against the walls zipping past her, with like-volcanoes bursting from the rock floor below. Aseles screamed as the shark had blazed right past her, and she quickly cut to the right side, her hair flying behind her as Flounder began to hyperventilate in her arms.

"Sora!" Aseles cried out, but the sound of snapping jaws approached right behind her again.

“ASELES!” the group called from the distance as Aseles ducked around the erupting volcanoes around the bed floor, the flashes of red illuminating against the shark’s pointed face. The boiling water burst among Aseles’s face as her body began to prickle hotly.

“Hold on tight!” Aseles advised as Flounder did so. She hugged him with one arm, and swung her keyblade out with her free hand. She smacked it against the boiling volcanoes she was passing, making the hot water burst up from behind her. The sound of snapping jaws decreased as Aseles turned around, quickly ducking herself in between the space of four small volcanoes at the bottom floor, her eyes peering up to see the shark was now in view. Its face darted around as Aseles clamped her keyblade’s handle against Flounder’s mouth, but unable to stop his great trembling.

Finally, the shark began to make its way back the way it came, and after a few moments of silence, Aseles sighed heavily, letting go of Flounder.

“T-T-That was close....” Flounder shivered as Aseles swam up, gripping onto her chest.

“Too close....we were almost shark food,” Aseles gulped loudly, exhaling deeply. She called off her keyblade, but frozen when she felt something approaching. However, she realized when she

saw it was Sora, Donald, Goofy and Sebastian.

“Are you guys alright?” Sora hurried forward.

“Yeah...just shaken,” Aseles nodded. “Let’s keep going.” Too afraid to move, Aseles cradled Flounder in her arms again, with Sora and Sebastian leading the way with a swimming Donald and Goofy alongside Aseles. It was a few moments until the group stopped at the end of the darkened place, seeing a humungous, coral cave shaped like a monstrous face in the distance, radiating with a pink and purplish glow around it. Aseles stared at it in fright, with Flounder burying his face into her wavering hair. Sora, unhesitant, led the way as Aseles followed behind him with Donald and Goofy trying their best to keep up.

Entering the mouth, the rest bravely followed Sora inside. Aseles looked about the dimmed area, passing by the hanging seaweed from the ceiling, and trying to ignore the plants on the floor of the cave that held horrified dispositions on their faces. They were black with big bulgy eyes, sharp mouths, and were crooked like beaten accordions. Then...there was the sound of voices, and Sora rushed ahead with the others swiftly following behind him.

As they reached the end, they were almost blown back from the rushing winds to see Ariel was caught in some sort of twister, hovering above a cauldron in the center of the room. At the other end was a cackling woman, half octopus with her white hair swimming along happily at the top of her head. Her bulgy arms shot at her sides with a golden shell necklace flying about her wide neck.

Her eyes as dark as the night held Ariel’s reflection as she cried out, wriggling relentlessly within the vortex. Outside of the twister floated two eels, and their eyes shot around to look toward the group.

“Flotsam, Jetsam! Stop those fools!” the witch shot her arm forward, and the eels began to charge their way toward the group in haste.

“Take this!” Sora and Donald shot themselves in front, weapons at the ready as they sent a flying orbs of blue crashing against the creatures. The creatures cried out in agony as they fell to the floor, covered in complete, thick ice.

“Let’s get Ariel out of there!” Sora commanded as Aseles let go of Flounder and flashed out her own keyblade.

“You’re a little late to save your princess!” Ursula cackled from behind. The winds roared wildly as Donald, Goofy, Sora and Aseles took a couple paces back, Flounder and Sebastian huddled against the rock wall for protection.

“Get her out anyway you can!” Sora cried out from the roaring winds.

"Ariel!" Donald yelled and headed toward the twister, but the charge backfired, sending him toward Goofy. Sora and Aseles both charged next, though Sora was sent back moments later, almost slamming against the ceiling. However, Aseles kept her momentum, kicking frantically through. Her skin radiated in bright red as she snarled, her eyes pulsing a deep maroon. Her hands fought forward, clawing against the winds as she felt her skin almost tearing itself apart.

"Ariel!" Aseles pushed her way forcefully across, feeling the room spinning behind her. Her hand jerked forward, able to reach outside the vortex and she felt the still air where Ariel floated. However, the mermaid was unable to hear her, her eyes closed and her face shooting up toward the ceiling. Her hair flew wildly around her, and her body suddenly began to glow. Further Aseles pushed herself, the red adrenaline kicking into high gear.

*Why do you continue to have a traitor among your group?*

Aseles's eyes widened, "N-NO!"

*She is of no value to you, but to us....she is of our kind.*

"ARIEL!!!" Aseles screamed louder.

"We had a deal!" Ursula cunningly cried out, "the contract cannot be broken!"

"Aseles, pull out!" Sora, Donald and Goofy shouted out from behind.

*She is tricking you.*

The burst of red vanished, and Aseles's eyes widened in horror. Her body began to spin uncontrollably within the harsh winds of the vortex, her body slamming in every direction. She gritted her teeth as her body drained of all possibly energy. In lightning speed, the world spun mercilessly as Aseles felt the crushing wall smacking her right in her front and sides. She whined sharply in extreme agony, falling to the sandy floor as the particles picked up to dance around her defeat.

"Aseles!" Sora cried out as he lifted her off the ground, her body hunching forward from the massive agony along her spine. She looked up, wincing to see smoke-like hands forming from the huge cloud of smoke surround Ariel, and they began to dig themselves into Ariel's mouth. Ariel gasped, clutching her throat as the hands retrieved a small, glowing orb from inside her throat.

"She stole Ariel's voice!" Flounder yelled, covering his eyes in fear. Ariel was suddenly engulfed into a green, huge bubble, the twister instantly dying as she began to morph and push herself against the edges of the bubble. Her tail twisted from within the confinements as it suddenly glowed, separating and forming legs, human legs. The bubble exploded the next second, her intake of air halted abruptly as Ariel was shown in nothing but a ragged cloth around her chest, pushing frantically against her thighs as her arms flailed in the water.

It was in an instant Sora rushed forward as Goofy aided Aseles, carrying her on top of his shell with Donald hurrying over to help Sora. The two began to hurriedly swim up toward the surface of the ocean, the rest following as best as they could behind them as Ursula's cackle echoed from below the deepest parts of the ocean floor.

LATER:

"She's got legs, you idiot!" Sebastian yelled at Scuttle in annoyance. "She's only got three days for that prince of hers to kiss her until sunset!"

"Oh, I seeeeeeee," Scuttle rested his feet on Ariel leg as she sat with her legs crossed, her bottom pressing against the wet shore. The fact that they weren't able to save Ariel still lingered upon Aseles's mind, and it kept gnawing mercilessly into her skull on how, so suddenly, she had lost the inflammation of that red power inside her.

Becoming human for Eric was probably...the most outrageous thing Ariel could do, to know him and love him with legs on land...but the idea was a bit too radical in Aseles's point of view...for someone she never met. Meanwhile, Sora and Donald continued to examine Aseles's injuries. She hit the rock wall hard....she felt completely dismantled.

"What should we do now?" Goofy asked.

"We should tell her father, that's what!" Sebastian hollered.

"No, we can't do that!" Sora said instantly argued. And considering Triton would have all of their heads for this...

"Oh yes we can!" Sebastian started to head toward off shore, walking away. Ariel quickly grabbed him, shaking her head with the emotion of plea swelling upon her face.

"Don't shake your head at me, young lady! I'm going to go and tell your father! He can fix it, and then you'll be in your home again, under the sea," he finished with a cheerful smile.

"Sebastian....that really isn't a good idea, if you think about it," Aseles retorted, wincing a bit from her sensitive bruises, "Yeah, this is crazy...but she's already here...why not just...give her a chance?"

"....." Sebastian sighed heavily, his face looking at Ariel with sorrowful eyes, "Ay woman.....fine...we'll...help you...get your prince." Ariel smiled excitedly, kissing Sebastian on his cheek. Sebastian groaned, crossing his arms.

"With Ursula having her sign that contract, this won't be easy to go around," Sora held his chin in thought. "There is no doubt in my mind that her father will be looking for us too since she's going to be away for days..."

"What would happen if Ariel doesn't do what she needs to do before time is up?" Aseles asked Sebastian.

"That's the worst part; she belongs to Ursula," Sebastian responded as he grabbed his chin sadly.

"We'll just have to play along," Sora suggested, "For now. Until then, we'll keep an eye out for Triton, AND Ursula." Everyone shivered at this. What if Ariel's father managed found out? For sure, he was going to skin them all alive and feed them to the shark they encountered before.

Suddenly the shout of barks echoed from the distance, and instantly the group disbanded with Sebastian jumping onto Ariel and hiding within her rags. Aseles quickly swam into the water, though poked her head up to see it was Max, Eric's dog again, heading toward Ariel who was scrambling around a boulder until finally she climbed up on top of it, looking at Max anxiously.

Behind the boulders, the group watched intently to see Eric in view, taking a glance to Max who was now perching his paws on the boulder with his mouth drooling excitedly toward Ariel. Eric's eyes lingered up and spotted her.

"What's he saying?" Flounder insisted.

"I can't hear from all the way over here," Sora replied.

"He's asking her if she's alright," Aseles began, holding onto her stomach, "He wants to take her up to his palace."

"How can you hear from all the way over here?" Donald raised a brow.

"UGH!" Aseles inhaled sharply, slouching.

"You're hurt....c'mon guys, we have to tend to her first," Sora replied as he wrapped an arm around Aseles's shoulder, leading the way back down toward the ocean floor. All they could do was wish Ariel the best of luck.

MOMENTS LATER:

Taking precaution, Sora figured it was best to not enter the palace in any circumstance or hang around its nearby grounds. Aseles was placed in an abandoned open area, only able to do with the massive pain as long as she could; she found it very difficult to ignore, and the fact that Donald and Sora were out of magic....that did not calm her slightest. You were resting in an open area, and you continued to deal with the massive pain.

"They sell potions in the palace walls," Flounder replied.

"Then we have no choice but to buy some," Sora replied, rubbing his cheek in thought.

"We'll go, you take care of her," Donald nodded to Sora. From his explanation, the injury turned out more grave than what it had seemed, mostly the internal bruising was what made it difficult to move.

"Alright, be careful. Bring two," Sora replied back as he and Aseles saw them off and heading around the rock wall, disappearing from view. Just perfect, this couldn't get any better.

"Are you alright, Aseles?" Sora questioned, helping Aseles sit up as she sat on a curving rock.

"Not to be rude, but do I look alright?" Aseles winced. Her hair hung around her face, a large scowl planted on her lips.

Sora hovered in front of her, but then swam around to float behind her. His hands pressed against her back, gently moving her hair away from her back and letting it rest on a shoulder. Aseles felt the hot flush possess her face, but she bit her tongue and closed her eyes, knowing her protruding thoughts were coming back. He seemed to be checking for any missed bruises, but the way he was cradling her skin in his hands made it impossible for her to think he was doing that.

"I'm sorry...for sending you in like that," Sora replied. He came around and sat beside Aseles, his hands gripping each other as he rested them on his bending fin. Aseles looked to him, seeing his eyes looking away from hers.

"Sending me?"

"Get her out anyway you can'....remember?" Sora scoffed angrily to himself, shaking his head. "It was the wrong command...."

"No it wasn't," Aseles shook her head, "I almost had her....until...." She swallowed roughly.

"Until what?" Sora looked to her, turning his head slightly to face her direction.

"....It's nothing," Aseles shook her head urgently.

Sora groaned, rolling his eyes, "This again? You don't plan on telling me?"

"Sora, there's nothing to tell," Aseles cut in.

"Yes there is; you don't trust me," Sora looked away, insulted.

"No-No! I trust yo- MMPH!" Aseles lifted an arm, but quickly jerked back, refraining herself from letting her hand touch Sora's shoulder. He quickly looked about, placing his right hand on the back of her side, keeping her steady. His left went forward, holding onto her left arm as he soothed it gently.

"Don't move around so much...you'll only make it worse," Sora replied. Aseles looked toward his fingers, though the flush was not going away.



"I'm sorry, Sora, that I can't trust you enough to tell you..." Aseles started.

"Tell me what?" Sora asked. Aseles lifted her face to him, and felt the whole water had gone dry. She looked up into his eyes, and felt the pulsing of her racing heart in her throat, making her skin throb. Sora's eyes lowered as he looked right at her, his left hand gliding up in the water, and cupping the right side of her face. Her hair lightly tangled in his grip as Sora blinked slowly, his forehead almost resting against hers. She could feel his own heart racing, throbbing on his forehead, running along the veins of his arms and neck. This was unreal, and yet, they were here, looking at each other so intently, feeding off of each other's anticipation, intensity of the moment. Would she make a move?

He came closer with his lips now presenting themselves to her, welcoming and tender. They looked....so inviting, so warm that it sent her skin crawling to its maximum. The moment began to become delicious, but try as she might, Aseles could not break it off. Her cheeks had become a vibrant rosy while Sora's fluttered in slight pink.

Finally, "That....um.....my mind is just.....wow, I just lost my train of thoughts," Aseles waved her hand in between them. Sora blinked, though he cleared his throat, slowly letting go of her, though his hand still lingered at her side.

"I-It's fine...it's fine," Sora nodded quickly. "Lemme just...." Sora had begun to examine her injuries once more, and she was quite glad that he couldn't see her face. She inhaled as she tried to replenish her track of thoughts...though she relished the feeling of having Sora glide his hands across her back and shoulders. It felt...insanely good, but she knew this was absurd thinking. What had happened in those few moments sent Aseles's mind out the window.

The thought of liking Sora....was too insane. It was too bold to make a judgment on. It couldn't possibly flourish....so what was this...annoying, raging feeling in the pit of her stomach. It seemed so familiar....

After a few more minutes, the others had arrived, unnoticed by King Triton, and with the potions in hand. Instructed to, Aseles drank both of the potions, and she slowly began to feel the juices of energy beginning to take over her being. She felt much better, but the swirling feelings did not cease.

"Thank you," Aseles looked to Donald, Goofy and Flounder. Her eyes turned to Sora who looked back at her, and again, that look in his eyes emerged, sparkling and ravaging in her sight. Did Aseles open a Pandora box?

FFW:

It was thought out to check on Ariel each passing hour, but Sora being so close beside her, Aseles knew she was having less privacy by the second. The practice of songs was out of the question now that the main star had decided to sprout out legs. In addition, the palace of Atlantica seemed to be in chaos in search for Ariel, and the others could not stay out in the open for long. No one had bothered to check her Grotto, so that's where Aseles waited while Sora and the others went to go check on Ariel's situation.

Aseles sat on the perched rock, looking about the Grotto, but instantly becoming bored of staying in the same place for so long. She began to make her way gently toward the section of books Ariel had, but found none to her liking.

"..Sora..." Aseles froze, but she whirled around hurriedly, her eyes darting among the Grotto.

"Who's there, show yourself!" Aseles called out.

*"Promise me...that we'll never forget each other."*

Aseles found herself hunching forward, gripping onto the top of her head, wanting to pull her strands out of her head. This persisting voice....it was hurting her ears, though she could not remember who was talking to her. Who was this??

*"All for one and one for all!"*

"What the-" Aseles felt her body quaking, and found the Grotto spinning around and around, Aseles's hair flying in all directions. At last, she regained the steady world as she clamped her hand against the rock shelf, staring intently at the music box from earlier. Just as the feeling had arrived, it went away. Aseles sighed, dropping her head gently as she stared at the ground. What had all that been about?

"Aseles?"

"AHH!" Aseles jumped, clamping her hand to her mouth as she shot around, seeing the others entering the Grotto with Flounder in the lead. Aseles took in a shaky breath, but cleared her throat as she advanced, looking to see Sora, Donald and Goofy looking worriedly at her.

"Did we...interrupt something?" Sora asked.

"N-No! I was just up...looking at Ariel's things...." Aseles threw her arms around her, waving her hands about. "I just....got distracted. AHEM. So any news from Ariel?"

"She's only got one day left....and nothing," Flounder pouted, crossing his arms.

"They've got to kiss now," Donald mumbled.

"Then it's time to make that happen. C'mon," Sora replied as he led the way out of the Grotto. Swimming to the shore a while later, Sora had led them to the spot where Ariel had first arrived on land, but she didn't seem to be anywhere on sight.

"Huh...she's not here," Goofy looked around. Just then from above the setting sky, Scuttle was arriving, cawing out a greeting.

"Hey, Ariel and Eric are close!" he called out excitedly. "Follow me!" He began to fly off as the others immediately began to follow him, cutting around the rocky cliffs until they had arrived at a calm, marsh of water. In the distance, the group could see Ariel was in a small boat with Eric, heading into the deepest parts of a lagoon. Flounder crept along the reeds as Sora, Donald, Goofy and Aseles sunk in deeper into the water, following Flounder's back fin as a guide.

The water began to become shallow, but rest assured, the group ducked behind a wall of swaying leaves from that of a large willow tree. Eric began to row the boat inside it, unaware of Scuttle opening the leaves like curtains. Fireflies floated around and the cattails swayed easily among the groves of grass. The rest of you snuck in gently, with Ariel taking notice of their presence, but keeping her attention to Eric.

"I'll sing to make it more romantic," Donald said, swimming toward them.

"No!" the rest argued in a whisper. Donald sighed in disappointment.

"I'll go, I am a natural singer," Scuttle suggested, giving a wink, and flying toward Ariel and her prince. He landed on a branch above the boat and he cleared his throat. Well, how bad of a singer could he be?

He began to squawk, terribly, "Waaa, waa waa wa~!" Aseles floated, mortified as Sora smacked his face with a hand, groaning to himself as Goofy ducked his head back in his shell.

Eric looked up, turning toward Ariel, "Wow.....they really should put that bird down....I mean....it sounds like its suffering." Ariel looked to Scuttle, covering her eyes with her palm and shaking her head in disbelief. Scuttle, however, was enjoying himself, giving a thumbs-up to her as they rowed by.

"Make him stop!" Aseles whispered. Donald picked up a firm rock, and launched it forward, hitting the bark of the tree as Scuttle freaked, instantly flying off and almost falling into the water. Aseles almost laughed out loud, but her mind averted to see Sebastian coming out of the boat, swimming into the lake with a plop. A few seconds later, he rose up among the edge of the boat behind Eric, gripping a cattail in his hand, and the next second, he was already orchestrating a song.

Fantastically, the wind blew perfectly, a rhythm emerged from the arriving turtles and fishes, and the beats played with much excellence. He started to sing lowly, gripping the attention of more animals nearby.

"Let's get a closer look," Sora replied as he swam forward as Aseles followed behind him quietly as possible. The flamingos, toads, and fish started to sing along, following the rhythm that Sebastian put. Aseles floated alongside Sora as he smiled, looking to see the mood was playing in Ariel's favor.

"They'll kiss!" Aseles whispered excitedly, turning her hands into fists and shaking them in front of her in anticipation.

"C'mon...." Sora gritted his teeth as Donald and Goofy watched from the other side with Flounder. Soon enough, Eric and Ariel began to lean toward each other, Eric holding her hands as their mouth loomed so closely to each other.

"Almoost...." Aseles's eyes widened, her mouth opening fully to a large grin as the fireflies circled around their faces.

"...Aseles?" Sora asked.

Aseles blinked, shooting her eyes to see, and seeing that sparkle in his eyes again. Sora opened his mouth to say something- SPLASH.

Aseles shot her eyes to the side as Sora followed, the water around becoming eerily still with Ariel and Eric throw out of the boat and floating on the surface of the water. The animals scattered wildly as Sebastian almost cried out from the unfortunate event.

Aseles gasped as she felt something grip the hook of her tail, and the next second, her scream was muffled by the water as she was pulled under. She shot her eyes up to see Sora's silhouette following among the murky water, but the grasp of the eels preventing Aseles from pulling up, or shouting as she could feel the tail of one wrap itself tightly around her face. The water rushed her hair up as she continued to sink, trying to fight off Flotsam and Jetsam, but to no avail.

"Aseles!" Sora called out, but his figure was disappearing as everything was growing pitch-black the further she sank.

"Sora!" she muffled into her bind, but she knew he was no longer in earshot. Her intake for water began to cease, with her eyes flickering to stay open. She opened her palm that was trapped at the side, trying desperately to call for her keyblade, but found that her senses sinking, and her mind

blacking out the next second.

## Collapse

*It felt almost like..... floating on cold clouds.....*

*Her eyes flickered, knowing she was resting on a bed. She rubbed her eyes with her palms, confused and dazed, unsure where she was. She felt tensed around the bones, automatically turning rigid when she saw herself in a white room....again. Crap. Here again.*

*"Not again," she kicked the bed's edge, annoyed by this whole madness. Wasn't this unfair....finding herself here every time whenever she dozed off? No doubt that she would confront Axel again.*

*Aseles looked about, but saw nothing out of the ordinary....except for the bed, but she wasn't planning to stick around for long, or she hoped that wasn't the case. She began to immediately head toward the white handled doors, opening them reluctantly until she could poke her head out. It was a hallway, with the column and statues leading up and down the corridor, with nothing but silence in the air.*

*Aseles moved herself out as she closed the door behind her silently, making her way through the hallway as her eyes darted back and forth between the space. She continued, but pressed herself against the wall, feeling her legs give way to any strength she could have. She opened her palm, and waited.....and waited.....but the keyblade had refused to make its appearance. This was a nightmare. Her eyes looked toward the pair of doors that were in the center at the end, and she began to make her way there, unsure of where she was going....but somehow knowing where it would lead. She grabbed the handles, swallowing strongly, but pulled them open and entered. Inside, she saw the tall chairs forming a circle around the center of the platform, surrounding Aseles as if she were a dwarf.*

*When she reached the center, she looked about to see each giant chair held a number at their heads, with number I the tallest, and number XIII the lowest. There was a thud, and Aseles immediately turned, but found that a pair of doors opened themselves at the end. Hesitantly, Aseles began to head toward them, looking about...but unsure where it was leading. She ventured forth, feeling immensely disturbed as she found herself in what seemed like an arena of some sort, with a glass wall at the far end with numerous chairs sitting behind it, protected.*

*The doors suddenly then slammed shut, locking themselves as Aseles swiftly turned to face them. She ran to them and slammed her hands against the handles, but quickly she recoiled back from the hot metal that had burned her top skin.*

*"Ow!" she blew her palms, quickly spitting on them to cool them off. She looked back around, and noticed that the chairs at the far end had been taken possession. The Organization XIII members were not.....exactly thirteen people....and that threw off Aseles completely. However, she boldly turned, feeling the stings of her body pulsing, knowing fully well that she recognized at least two of them. Who knew she would feel so naked here....it wasn't home, and yet...she knew what she was getting herself into.*

*One member at the center suddenly began to clap, putting Aseles instantly on edge, " Aseles, you have finally arrived."*

*"What do you mean 'arrived'? I was brought here by force!" Aseles gritted her teeth.*

*"What do you suppose the purpose is?" another member asked that was sitting next to the center throne, "I mean of bringing her here. This is nonsense."*

*"I believed it was time we met, I get to know each other a little more, seeing that one of my members has failed to bring her here physically," the first member said once again.*

*"Apologies," another member nearby replied.*

*"Whatever you're planning, I don't want any part in it! You guys are nothing but manipulating creatures!" Aseles bellowed out.*

*"Is that so?" he asked. Aseles narrowed her eyes. "It comes to my attention that we are not the ones manipulating you."*

*"...What do you mean?" Aseles asked carefully.*

*"When you remember nothing of your past...who is to say what you have experienced before was all a fantasy?" the member suddenly stood up from his chair, his hands behind his back. Aseles could feel him staring directly at her, making her inflexible. "Who is to say that we cannot deliver your memories in full? We may have no hearts....but we understand each other perfectly."*

*Aseles's eyes widened as she looked to the ground, her body shaking in place. No...how could this be?*

*"They say they understand you...but do they really? No, they do not. They do not lack memories, nor do they endure the pain of being lost," the man replied again in a husky voice. "They are the ones manipulating you."*

*"Y-You're lying!" Aseles shot back, angrily, the shining of her eyes liquidating to the edges of her lids.*

*"I am merely stating the fact Aseles that you, are just like us. We have nowhere to fit in the rest of the world....except right here, in this castle. It is a home for us, and it can be yours-"*

*"I said, SHUT UP!" Aseles flared in rage, her teeth gritting against each other.*

*"The decision is yours to make Aseles...I cannot make it for you. I will not sink so low as to changing your mind by force," the man replied. Aseles's eyes widened, seeing him sit back down, "I will await your decision...but know that there is a time limit for everything. My offer will stand open....but not for long."*

*Aseles stood immobile with a hot sensation running up the back of her spine, then climbing cold around her neck. She breathed heavily as the room began to illuminate brightly with white, blinding everything in sight.*

*Aseles closed and then opened her eyes in a matter of seconds, finding herself in murky waters, with her hair swaying among her face with her fish tail swinging below. It was just a dream...*

*She picked up her head groggily to see she was in a dark cavern of some sorts, but with one look at the cauldron in the center, she knew she was in Ursula's lair again, tied up in constricting seaweeds that gripped her wrists and tail end. She struggled to move, but failed to release from her tight binds.*

*She examined the room carefully, a throbbing sensation at the pit of her stomach. A second later, she kicked furiously back and forth, trying to remove the strong and gross seaweed, but to no use. Her pupils became smaller by the second as she fiercely tried to escape. She opened her palm, but the keyblade did not arrive.*

*"What's wrong with me?" she hissed to herself. Suddenly, there was a short cackle and Aseles*

shot her head up, freezing to see Ursula was hanging upside down on the rock ceiling, with the colors of her witch pot glittering along her face. She released herself from the spot, and floated in front of Aseles. What was she going to do? What could possibly be her plan?

"Well, well, well, what have we got here?" she said with a finger on her chin. Her eels appeared behind her and began to circle around her wide body, their one, and yellow glowing eyes shining in the dark. She picked up Aseles's chin with a tentacle "Not the one I was expecting, but you will do. First, we should discuss how you got yourself into this sticky situation?"

Aseles responded with nothing, looking down on the floor with your hair over her face. Her mind was roaming back to what that man had said in her dream....and couldn't help that this....was her punishment for not listening to what he had to say. Could...they really offer her something such as that? It was....a ludacris thought.

Aseles gasped as her hair was wrung back forcefully, her face shooting up to look at Ursula. The tentacle pushed and pulled, making her head nod.

"Let's see," Ursula let go of her hair as Aseles felt slight relief. Ursula began to swim to the shelves, her mind pondering on what to brew, "You interfered with my plan with that pesky princess, and you're friends with that foolish keybearer-"

"He's not foolish!" Aseles shouted immediately. Ursula stopped, turning toward Aseles's direction. She grinned as Aseles bit her tongue.

She turned back, continuing where she left off, "He is quite a catch." She chuckled as Aseles struggled again, her face snarling. Ursula began to toss in several bottles into her curving stone pot in the center, "Too bad he's going to miss out on you turning into a Heartless." Aseles gasped, feeling one of her tentacles grab her hair again. OW. "I'm going to take your heart," Ursula smirked, "And give it to them as a gift."

Aseles's face turned pale as her blood raced in flight mode. The words sank in like daggers, and Aseles couldn't help but hope she didn't even have a heart to begin with.

**SORA'S POV:**

Where could she be? Where could Aseles possibly be? Sora had grasped what had happened to Aseles, but he just couldn't take a guess on where she would be taken to. Whoever had taken her, he did not catch the sight of them. To make things worse, Ariel had only a few hours to kiss Eric.

The group waited at the cliff's side, Donald and Goofy worriedly looking to Sora who bit onto the side of his hand, looking dead ahead in concentration. There was something swimming around the side, and Sora turned to squint his eyes. It was Flounder, panting from the quick swim.

"Come on," Flounder gasped as he began to swim to the surface, Sora, Donald, and Goofy following. Flounder looked around as Sora looked intently at him, and then saw him swimming perfectly in one direction. Sora, Donald and Goofy broke the surface, looking to see Flounder swimming to a pier at the distance near Eric's palace...with the sun already setting.

The pier was decorated with banners and strings of white around the dock and pillars. A ship was already sailing toward the horizon away, leaving Ariel with her blue dress crying by the wooden pier. Sora had a feeling this wasn't going to be very good news.

**ASELES'S POV:**

Aseles was completely exhausted of the pure agony running across her body. The spells prepared for her were unreal, and she could feel her stomach unraveling. The thudding of her heart began to

increase and decrease in random spikes, and it was leaving her trembling and terrified. Thank goodness Ursula was gone, but the eels were not planning on leaving Aseles completely unscathed.

Her eyes were half opened as she hung lazily by the dry and strong seaweed that held her like a prisoner. She felt completely sore, and couldn't seem to grasp the thudding in her head. There was nothing to do but fight with will, and hope that she would come out of this alive. She grunted again, feeling another spell of Ursula's sting across her skin. She exhaled sharply, shaking the agonizing thoughts out.

*She is of our kind....*

Aseles's eyes narrowed as she gritted her teeth, her hands turning into clubs.

*They are the ones manipulating you.*

"No..." Aseles growled, feeling the jolt of red flaming along her skin.

*We understand each other perfectly. Who is to say that all that you've experienced is nothing but a fantasy?*

"That's...not true," Aseles shook her head to and fro.

*She is....of our kind.*

Aseles shouted angrily as the flames on her hair ran wild about her. The winds blew rapidly away as Aseles growled louder, her hands opening widely. She slammed her hands forward as the binds among her body instantly gave way to her tremendous strength, the keyblade flashing in her hand. The eels quickly shot forward, but Aseles wasted no time in slicing across the air, killing them on the spot as they fell to the ground, lifeless and bleeding.

Aseles shot her eyes around, her eyes bloodshot red in the irises, "NOO!" She gripped onto her head as she swung herself from side to side, grunting and crying. The red gradually gave up possession as her hair fell back down to dark brunette, her eyes dropping to their cool color again. Aseles blinked, looking about, and looking down to the eels she had sliced. She swallowed roughly, but quickly began to make her way out of the cavern, her tail kicking frantically behind her.

Soon enough, she was breaking through the surface of the ocean, feeling the sun's rays hit her warmly. She looked around the distance, then to the horizon to see a couple of figures swimming by. To her amazement and fabulous luck, it was Ariel being pulled by Flounder, Sora, Donald and Goofy. As best as she could, Aseles began to endure the upsetting feeling in her stomach, trying her best to catch up to them.

*They say they understand you...but do they really?*

Aseles followed roughly, feeling her guts turning upside down. She felt instantly dizzy, and the feeling of vomit rose up in her throat. She swallowed it back down, trying to take in deep breathes.

*This is our home...and it can be yours.*

Faster and faster Aseles swam, gasping in continuously and trying to chug in the air and water. The thudding in her chest increased, but she did not falter to stay on track behind the group as they reached the side of a large sailing boat. Ariel seemed to be climbing up the ship's side, with Sora and the others floating and staying close to the ship. The horizon was already setting its sun into its



sheets of water, making the sky turn red and orange. Above Scuttle rampaged the deck of the ship with jumping seals, tackling flamingos, bird, fish and dolphins from every direction attacking the ship on either side. What was going on?

Aseles began to rapidly make her way with her eyes rolling. Aseles opened her mouth to say something, but the words would not come out. Aseles began to feel herself sink below, her eyes rolling up as her body began to sink. However, she felt a yank, and saw herself being pulled out of the water by Sora who held her firmly in place, his arms around her shoulders. Her body was completely drained of energy with her skin drained of any color. She couldn't tell if her eyes were all the way open or not.

"Aseles," he started, trying to hold her up properly. There were several screams from the top of the deck, but Aseles heard them muffled and weak.

"What happened to her?" Flounder worriedly asked. Aseles's eyes rolled, knowing her vision was becoming worse. She wanted to lie down and rest, but that was not the case when everyone jolted around, and saw Ursula dropping from the deck, with Ariel gripped tightly in her grasp.

"Ariel!" Eric called from above as the horizon's sun sank, indicating sunset had passed. Sora immediately swam down as Aseles gripped onto him for assistance to follow.

"Sora!" Ariel called with her head turned. Ursula stopped in her tracks and turned around, her grip wrapped around Ariel's wrist, yanking her back. Sora, Donald and Goofy immediately called their weapons out as Aseles tried her best to stay afloat, though Flounder went to go assist her.

"No....!" Ursula yelled in a fury, shooting her eyes to the wincing Aseles. "What have you done with Flotsam and Jetsam!?" Ursula began with a start, but a tall figure immediately took the place in front of her. Aseles's eyes widened to see it was King Triton himself, his trident pointed at Ursula's face with Sebastian by his side.

"Ursula, stop!" King Triton bellowed.

Ursula sneered, "You're too late Triton, she's mine!" She flung her hand forward, and a golden scarf of parchment rolled out to be view fully. At the bottom held Ariel's signature, and she nearly jabbed it in front of his face. Triton pointed his trident to the contract, and at that moment, shooting a lightening zap toward it. This sent the contract against Ursula's chest, but the witch held her place with Ariel still in her grasp. The parchment was not even scratched.

"You see, your little girl decided it was best to live on the land. Although....I can take replacements," Ursula grinned widely.

"No your Majesty!" Sebastian waved his arms frantically. King Triton looked to his assistance, then to Ariel, his eyes dropping slowly from the realization. Sora and the others stayed put, waiting anxiously as Flounder bit onto his fins.

King Triton narrowed his eyes, but then frowned, holding his mighty weapon out toward the contract. A small ray of light shined at the tip of it, his signature taking Ariel's place instead. The group gasped as a twister circled around Ariel's father, and then shrunk him to a small size. The twister disappeared as Aseles stood mortified to see the King was no more; he was a small plant like the ones in Ursula's cave, his trident by his side, and his crown around him like an oversized ring.

Ursula heftily picked up the crown, placing it on her head with a wide smile as she held the trident in her grasps, "It's mine, the power is mine!" She immediately pointed the trident toward the group, Sora immediately stepping out in front with keyblade drawn. Without thinking Ariel

grabbed Ursula, yanking the witch's head back as the trident's bolt shot through the water, missing the group by several inches. Ursula scowled as she tossed Ariel to the side, aiming the trident to Ariel's face.

"Quick!" Sora shouted.

"AH!" Ursula shot around, her arm pierced by a shooting spear as the others turned to see it was Eric who had delivered the blow, his eyes narrowed toward the witch in rage. "You pathetic fools! I rule the seas now!" The area immediately darkened as Ariel shot upwards, gripping onto Eric and pulling him out toward the surface.

"Hurry!" Sora commanded as he snared an arm around Aseles's waist, pulling her up as she gasped, grabbing onto him tightly around his bare neck. Goofy and Donald hurried behind as Sebastian and Flounder covered Triton below, with the explosion of black smog filling the entire sea floor.

Breaking the surface, the group immediately began to back up as the crown on Ursula's head back to rise from the surface....almost fifty times the size of its normal form. Ursula's body had taken a major transformation, and she was the size of a large giant, towering the others in such a ridiculous comparison. She literally almost reached the dark clouds above, the trident enormous in her palm as she began to wave it around above her, making the clouds thunder and roar in displeasure.

Ursula looked down with her evil beady eyes, "You insignificant fools!" Ursula's long tentacles suddenly shot themselves out from the sea, suddenly slamming itself rather harshly onto the water, and making the group disperse unwillingly.

One tentacle reached for Goofy as Donald was quick to rush beside him, throwing a Blizzard spell against the oncoming assault. Ursula's tentacle backed up as Goofy and Donald took cover. Ursula dug her trident then into the sea, making it spin slowly but powerfully as the currents began to make the water kick around to make a vortex in the water. Aseles began to flail widely, being pulled underwater as she tried to break free of the strong current. In a split second of luck, Aseles broke free as she kicked herself off quickly from the area as best as she could, and she broke the surface to see Ariel perched on a boulder, her eyes scanning restlessly for Eric who was swimming toward her from the front side. Ursula suddenly pointed her trident to Ariel, blasting off her from the rock and making her fall into the death-defying whirlpool in front of her.

"Ariel!" Sora cried out. Aseles panted heavily in place, feeling her bones rattle and quake.

*Why do you continue to have a traitor among your group?*

Aseles gritted her teeth, and began to swim her way forward, feeling that sickening sensation at the pit of her chest. She shook the thought out, flashing her keyblade out into view as she dove under the water, shooting through the strong current as Ursula's aimed her trident to Ariel who laid in the patch of dry ground below.

"Bullseye!" Ursula laughed as she shot a bolt forward. Aseles shouted as she cut through the water, appearing above Ariel as she swung her keyblade in front of her like a shield. The bolt caught against the body of the keyblade as Aseles grunted, shutting her eyes as she recoiled the bolt back, missing Ursula by a few inches and merely scathing the top of her shoulder. Aseles fell down as she hit the rock floor, groaning in pain as Ariel waddled over to her, quickly making her sit up.

"You insolent brat!" Ursula shouted as she aimed her trident yet again.

"Aseles!"

“ARRGH!” Aseles swung her keyblade in front, feeling the massive weight of the power Ursula had launched against her. Aseles used both palms to hold her trembling keyblade in place, the cascade of wild lightning running around Aseles with Ariel taking cover behind her. With great force, Ursula sent the bolt farther as Aseles could feel her arms tremble, and her keyblade beginning to back up against her chest. She winced as she held the position, but knew she could not hold it for long.

Suddenly, Aseles felt Ariel's grip behind, her hands overlapping Aseles's onto the grip of the keyblade's handle. Aseles cracked an eye open, looking to Ariel who gritted her teeth, with her arms trembling but turning rigid in place.

“You can't give up, Aseles!” Ariel replied. Aseles looked to her, seeing Ariel nodding to her determinedly, “We can win!” Aseles shot her eyes around, her lips turning into a firm line on her face. The series of shocks paved their way into Aseles's arms as she yelled, the instant of red flames rocketing out above her head. The keyblade stayed and glowed tremendously in maroon as Aseles shouted, flung her keyblade upwards with Ariel giving a final push.

In the odd of events, the bolt ricocheted and it struck Ursula on full blast to the center of her chest. Ursula yelled in complete agony, her knuckles white as she held firmly onto the trident, as if it were her last strand of life. The next second, a wrecked bow of the Sunken Ship was driven into her abdomen with Eric at the helm. A gush of ink flowed out and sprayed among the sea's surface as Ursula's eyes went up to her head with her fingers twitching from the striking and vivid lightening. Her tentacles coiled around her foe as Eric was quick to jump out to safety, diving into the water with Sora and the others quickly apprehending him.

Ursula began to descend underneath the water, losing grip of the trident as the crown slid off of her white hair and splashing fully into the sea. Ursula fell forward as the dried space where Ariel and Aseles were swarmed with water once more, both of them quickly swimming up toward the surface. Aseles broke it with a gasp, looking up to see that the sky was now taking a soft glow to it, commencing the morning of the next day; the last bubbles of Ursula's dark presence gone.

LATER:

Ariel sat perched on her rock, looking at Eric who lay on the shore unconscious. Her father looked at her from the distance, where Sora, Donald, Goofy, Aseles, Flounder and Sebastian also waited, looking in between the two. Triton's eyes were full of sorrow, with his form back in place with his crown and trident back in his grasp. His hair blew in the wind as Sebastian sighed.

“I'm sorry your Majesty, for everything,” Sebastian replied first. Triton turned to look at the group, with the others bowing their heads.

“Very sorry,” Goofy replied. They picked up their heads, but what they heard next was unbelievable to them.

“I'm really going to miss her....” he replied. Sora's eyes widened along with everyone else's as Triton sunk his trident toward the ocean's sheet with the sharp tips of it aiming for Ariel's direction. A glow of gold glitter began to float toward her as Ariel kept her attention to Eric, until she saw the flash of bright light behind her. Ariel turned, her eyes widened to see that the golden sheet was covering her lower body completely, riding up to cover her whole body. She smiled widely toward her father as Triton nodded. There was a bright flash, Aseles looking away momentarily as she looked up to see Ariel had dove into the water, and was now running up the shore with a blue, glittering dress in place. Her human legs easily carried her petite body forward with her arms opened in merriment toward the awakening Eric. He stood as he smiled widely, racing to her as he wrapped his arms around her, swinging her around with a small laugh.

"Y-Your Majesty!" Sebastian cried out.

"Why should I stop her from following her own dreams, Sebastian?" Triton replied. He turned to look at Sora, Donald, Goofy and Aseles, "Thank you for finding my daughter's happiness. You are welcomed any time you like."

Sora nodded graciously, "Take care. We'll be dropping by." Triton waved as did Flounder and Sebastian.

"Sora!" Ariel cried out. The four turned, seeing Ariel waving excitedly to their direction.

Sora waved back just the same, "See ya around, Ariel!" He dove beneath the waves as did his trio, the three beginning to sink their way down to their arriving destination.

However, the headache that had burst abruptly into Aseles's mind stopped her cold, and she inhaled greatly, trying to calm herself. Suddenly, everything shifted, and Aseles felt herself falling down, her hair about her face. She felt someone catch her, but did not think of the thought as she felt the collapse of something within her body, the pressure enormous in the chest. Her body had completely stopped function. It was becoming hard to breath.

"Aseles, what's wrong?" Sora's voice echoed. Her vision blurred off completely. "Aseles! Aseles wake up!"

"She's not breathing!" Goofy exclaimed.

"We've got to hurry!" Donald yelled back.

FFW:

Her fingers dug into something as she groaned in further pain, twisting back and forth in place. She screamed, feeling the sheets stick to her, with her blood bounce everywhere within her burning chest. It was as if someone had stuffed her throat with wood and burned it on the spot, letting the fumes choke and break her internally. Her heart rate pounced on different levels with the sweat raining down from her forehead. Her fingers started to dig in more with her head rolling from side to side.

"Aseles, can you hear me?" Leon asked, Aseles barely able to distinguish his voice. It was quite difficult to strain an answer, the answer itself struggling to comprehend what was happening. She felt a hand press against her forehead, and she winced from the feeling. Her heart then suddenly blazed on fire as she grunted, the tears rocketing off her eyes.

"What's wrong with her?" Sora asked.

"I'm not sure.....who did this to her?" Leon asked, placing a wet cold cloth on Aseles's forehead. She shuddered, her eyes rolling, willing to give anything to subdue this torture.

"We have no idea what Ursula did," Goofy added.

"Well we won't know unless she tells us, yes?" Cid asked from nearby.

"Aseles...can you hear us?" Sora's voice echoed. Aseles struggled to open her eyes, and found his face looming over hers. She tried to keep them awake, and her hands trembled. Her lips quaked as she swallowed, but instead threw her head to the side, coughing harshly.

"Aseles," Sora started, "You have to tell us something." Aseles nodded frantically, and her lifted a hand, accidentally slamming it against her chest. Her back bolted up from the bed, her breaths

ragged. She managed to point a finger out, and she began to tap the center of her chest as best as she could.

"Your heart?" Sora asked. Aseles coughed, but nodded frantically again.

Leon placed a hand on his chin, but then he dropped it, "Where's Cloud?" Everyone looked toward Leon.

"What can he do?" Sora said, standing in front.

"He always has something up his sleeve. Do you know where he is, Aerith?" Aerith nodded. "Will you?" Leon asked again as Aerith nodded again and headed for the door, and closed it behind her.

"But-" Sora started.

"If we don't do anything at this point, she won't even have a chance," Leon suddenly said aloud. Aseles felt her head rolling to the side again, hearing the silence of the room. She could...actually die?

Time ticked by, and Aseles wasn't sure how long it took until she felt the body sit beside her on the bed. She felt her hands wrapped around someone else's, but the feeling of his fingers were all too familiar, even when her body was collapsing. That trigger of emotions, she knew Sora was the one beside her

His thumb caressed the back of her hands, smoothing them softly. It was the only thing she could register before she felt the need to sleep.

A FEW HOURS LATER:

The pain had subsided only enough for Aseles to be able to bear her surroundings. She could hear the sound of footsteps from outside the door, unsure if Cid was still asleep or not. As for Donald, Goofy and Sora, their whereabouts were unknown to her, but she had to take the guess that they already left without her. It was a depressing thought...but the horrible throbbing shook her out of the feeling of being depressed about just being left behind. Was death really looming over here?

The sound of the door opening caught Aseles's attention, and she pushed her head back to see it was Leon and Cloud entering. Cid snorted himself awake as he rubbed his face, almost falling out of the chair. Leon and Cloud averted their attention to Aseles, and stood at the side of the bed. Cloud's eyes looked into her, grave and full as he bent down with his black, gloved hand pressing against her forehead, then proceeded to draw it down to rest at the center of her chest.

He removed it and stood, looking to Leon, "Stand her up." Leon looked to Aseles, and began to gently sit her up, wrapping an arm around her shoulders as the other held her waist in place. Cloud reached into one of his pockets, and in his hand Aseles could see the formation of some goo that was clear white, although she caught glimpses of it turning into different colors.

Cloud seemed unfazed as he approached, "Whatever she does, don't let her move."

"What are you planning to do-" Leon was interrupted as Cloud suddenly clutched one of Aseles's wrist, and yanked his filled hand forward, jabbing it at the center of her chest. Aseles gasped as she felt the prickling sensation of invasion of her body, and then the pain set in as she struggled, groaning out loudly in agony. Cid shot up from his chair as he hurried over, but stood mortified as he could only watch.

Aseles yelled, as Cloud twisted his hand, Leon forcefully holding her in place with his grip very

tight on her. He watched coolly, though he was slightly taken aback on how Cloud was taking this very smoothly. Further in his fingers dug as Aseles shut her eyes, feeling him push past her muscles and bones, biting at her body. Suddenly, there was a tight grasp, and Aseles held her position, still as stone as she hung her head forward and stared Cloud's arm with wide eyes. There was a tight hold on her, and she felt herself prisoner. Cloud rotated his wrist, and in one swift move, Cloud yanked his hand out. Aseles fell back as Leon caught her, Aseles gasping loudly as she held tightly onto the front of her shirt. She looked up to see Cloud holding up the goo he once held, seeing it had taken a whole complexion of black, as black as darkest abyss.

Cloud let go as Leon helped Aseles get her balance. She stood up without a problem as Cloud crushed the goo in his hand, letting the ash drop and disappear from view. He hit his hand clean, and then looked to Aseles, his eyes cold and direct. What just happened?

"How do you feel?" Leon asked.

Aseles swallowed, looking to him, "Better."

"How did you do that?" Cid asked, looking to Cloud.

"...Instinct," Cloud replied, not blinking.

"C-Cloud....I-"

"Follow me," Cloud suddenly replied. Aseles blinked, but found Cloud beginning to head toward the door.

"Wait!" Aseles said at once. Cloud turned to look at her with indescribable eyes, silent. Aseles gulped, but found him opening the door. Aseles quickly walked outside as Cloud turned around to give on last look to Leon and Cid, and then closed the door. Cloud began to walk down the pathway of the houses as Aseles watched him go, but quickly began to regain some paces until she was walking somewhere behind him.

"Cloud?" Aseles asked as Cloud did not turn. "What....was that?"

"You feel better?" Cloud suddenly asked.

Aseles nodded, "....Um....yes."

"Then there's no point in asking what it was," Cloud replied as he continued to walk. Aseles blinked, but quickly followed, seeing him walking up the flight of stairs that led to the Market Place. Aseles did not question until finally he stopped on the open space, his eyes looking off to the castle in the distance with the half heart mechanism in the front. Aseles stood beside him, looking off to it as well.

"Did...you want to tell me something?" Aseles began.

After a few minutes of silence, "I sense Darkness within you. I want to know how you do it." Aseles slowly turned to look at Cloud, his blond hair slightly blowing from the slight breeze.

"Darkness? In me?" Aseles took a step back.

"You don't realize it...but it's there," Cloud replied grimly. He opened his mouth again, "It's about my Darkness. It's about Sephiroth."

"Sephiroth?" Aseles blinked.

"He is my Darkness...." Cloud replied, turning fully around to look at Aseles.

Aseles blinked to him, "I...don't understand. I thought...people with only pure light could hold a keyblade. How do you know I have Darkness?"

"Because I can sense it," Cloud replied. "But it's not obvious, nor is it always present."

"I don't....understand," Aseles shook her head slowly. "But why come to me? Why don't you ask Leon, Sora, or Aerith?"

"Because you don't seem to judge anyone thus far," he said again, "you did not argue that I shouldn't go find him, nor that I was wrong. As far as I can tell, you hold no judgment until someone gives you a reason to judge." Aseles opened her mouth, but closed it a second later.

*They do not understand you.*

"...I'm...confused....is all," Aseles replied, darting her eyes to Cloud before looking away.

"About finding your light?" Cloud asked.

Aseles shook her head, "No....about finding a home." She walked a few paces forward, gripping onto the brick wall in front of her. She picked her head up, looking toward the castle in the distance, and felt the corners of her lips frown, "No one understands...these feelings I get.... they ever will."

"That shouldn't matter," Cloud came from beside, looking ahead again.

Aseles looked up to him, "...It doesn't matter, why not?"

"Because sympathy....it gets no one anywhere," Cloud responded.

Aseles blinked, "So....what does?"

"Knowing what you're going to do next," Cloud replied. "You still haven't answered my question."

"I...don't know how to. I didn't even know I had Darkness," Aseles fiddled with her fingers.

"...That's a shame," Cloud scoffed.

"Sorry."

"No need to apologize, I just made a wrong move," he replied.

"No you didn't....whatever it is that is bothering you...you should put an end to it...I know I would," Aseles replied next.

"I figured..." Cloud nodded slowly.

"Where's Sora? Do you know?" Aseles asked, unable to contain the curiosity to the fact that he might've already left.

"He told Leon he was going back to Disney Castle to gather some information on something," Cloud finished. So he did leave...but the way Cloud put it, Sora had every intention of coming back, somewhat putting Aseles in ease. She sighed as she looked ahead, leaning against the brick wall toward the castle.

She tilted her head at its appearance, quirking her mouth to one side, "You know...that place...is very familiar to me. You don't think I'm crazy, right?" Aseles turned, but she looked about. Cloud was gone.

Aseles turned back to look toward the castle, and swung her legs around, sitting on the edge of the wall. Her back slightly hunched as she was kept in trance with the view, the sun's rays hitting against the metal and making it gleam wonderfully in her view.

"Where do I belong...?" Aseles heaved, sulking her face into her hands.

LATER:

Aseles pushed Merlin's door open, but she was instantly greeted with seeing Donald and Goofy's face.

"Aseles!" Goofy and Donald smiled widely as they hurried over.

"Are you feeling better?" Goofy asked.

"Yeah," Aseles nodded, smiling warmly to their company.

"Hey champ, looks like you're back to normal," Yuffie came from beside, smacking Aseles square on the back. Aseles winced, seething.

"Yuffie, you're going to break her," Leon replied as he leaned against the wall.

"Oh...whoopsies," Yuffie smiled nervously, rubbing her back tenderly.

Aerith approached next, "It's good to see you're well, but have you seen Cloud?"

Aseles opened her mouth, thinking for a moment, "Um...I saw him in the Market Place." Aerith smiled as she left the room as Cid whirled around in his chair, going back to punch down some keys on the keyboard.

"Uh...Where's Sora?" Aseles's eyes darted around.

"He's at the Bailey," Donald said.

"We just arrived but I guess he wanted to be alone," Goofy replied.

"You should go see what he's up to," Yuffie suddenly slid from behind again, nudging Aseles.

Aseles quickly swatted her away, "I'm sure he's fine."

"Just be sure then," Leon replied.

Aseles sighed, "Fine..." She gave everyone a lazy wave as she left the room, walking past a couple of houses and beginning to make her way up the stairs that led to the Bailey.

Indeed when she went inside the shaded place, Sora was leaning against one of the balconies at the left side at the very end. Aseles took a breath and walked toward him silently, seeing his face in his crossed arms. Aseles slid on over, tapping his shoulder with three fingers. Sora picked up his head lightly and his eyes met hers instantly. They were blue as usual, but there seemed to be some sadness in his eyes.

"Sora, what's wrong?" Aseles asked.



"Nothing, you're okay now," Sora responded with a smile.

"That's not it, what's wrong?" she tried again.

"Just tired, that's all," Sora replied, standing up straighter as he rubbed the back of his head.

"Did you find what you wanted to look for?"

"How did you-"

"Um...Cloud told me."

Sora shook his head, tilting his head back momentarily before he shot it forward again, "No."

"Oh."

"But that doesn't mean I won't keep looking."

"I see."

"You feel any better?"

She nodded, "...Okay...I'm going to be honest. I thought you guys already left without me."

"Huh?" Sora looked around, meeting her gaze, "Why would we do that?"

"You're not going to stop saving the worlds just because one teammate is down, Sora," Aseles replied, shrugging.

"....We still wouldn't have left you," Sora replied. Aseles slowly turned to look at him, seeing his face again looming over hers.

"...Why not?" Aseles murmured.

Sora seemed attentive on something, but his mind was set back once more and he smiled, "Let's get going." Aseles blinked, but agreed to his motion as she followed behind him, though for an instant....she could've sworn his brown hair had turned to blond.

# Infection

FFW:

"Where to now?" Aseles stretched in her chair.

"Noooo....ideaaaaaaa," Sora hummed to himself, tapping his feet consecutively on the floor. Donald slumped in his chair with his arms crossed as Goofy hunched a bit forward, enough to rest his chin in his hand.

"There's nothing!" Sora added and released the handles of the gummi ship, throwing his arms in the air in irritation. Aseles smacked her lips, plating her chin in hand as her elbow rested on the arm of her chair. She was bored alright, but the lingering thoughts in her mind persisted through the whole journey, and she was reluctant to say anything about it to the others.

The recent occurrence with Axel.....it bothered her if they were real or not, including the last one. She guessed, for a fact, that the man talking to her was the leader of Organization XIII, she just knew it. Then Roxas...and Sora....jeez, how was she going to deal with that? Plus, the fact that they continued to badger on her to choose a side....Aseles did not know who to choose really. How could she? How could she deceive Sora, Donald and Goofy, when they've given her everything so far, as far as being friends and belonging somewhere...but somehow.....in some odd way, she knew she didn't belong here.

"Are we there yet?" she asked, a little annoyed.

"Nope!" Sora, Donald, and Goofy chimed in, making her groan.

It had been almost an hour, with Aseles coming and going in and out of the room in the back just to wash her face to wake herself up. The stars were now mocking at her eyes, instead of creating a beautiful scenery to admire. She started to bang her head against the arm of the chair, trying to take out Axel's face.

"Are we there yet?" she asked tiredly with her rear completely numb.

Sora turned his head, "Nope." He smiled as she groaned for....well she lost count by this time. Her arms locked her in as she hooked her leg over the other, looking off to the side. Her eyes began to drop slightly, but something suddenly rocked the ship roughly, making Aseles almost fall out of her seat. You picked up your head, instantly spotting the growing speck of a world approaching.

"What-" she started, but the ship rocked hard, everyone instantly falling out of their seats as Sora hooked himself among the control panel, his eyes checking among the scanners. The ship rocked back and forth again and again as Aseles shot her eyes out the window, seeing the atmosphere flashing through the glass, the thuds and rocks increasing in strength the further the ship descended.

Aseles struggled to pull herself up back into the seat as Donald took control of the wheel with Sora trading his seat for his. The gummi ship jerked forward like a flipping bull, Donald managing to pull back the handles toward him. However, the ship was now doing a vertical tailspin, and Aseles felt herself completely leave her seat, her hands sliding across the floor and air. There was the rush of icy wind piercing into the cockpit, and Aseles found her hair blowing among her face. The place was dark and it was two seconds later when she realized that she had been shot out of the gummi ship.

"Aseles!" Sora's face peered out as he held onto the ledges of the opened compartment, watching the girl descend further and further down. His voice became distant as her back smacked against the air terribly. The image of meeting solid ground terrified her, imagining all of her remains spread among the ground. Her eyes blinked rapidly as she gritted her teeth, feeling the air continuing to kick her with the air hissing in her ears.

"Stop!" Aseles growled as the white flames on her head shot upwards, and for an instant, Aseles was hovering in a straight line above the ground. She cried out in both jubilation and fright, but the bright white around her quickly dispersed, and she crashed into the cold water face first. She kicked violently up to the surface, trying to look into the dark night. She saw a blurred vision of lights up ahead, and began to instantly swim in that direction without a thought.

Sora's POV:

"Whoa, what is this world?" Sora walked around, checking his surroundings, and then looking at the open sea before the port they stood on. There were cannons rigged in front with some sort of brigs behind him. Donald and Goofy stood next to him, curious as to where they were.

"Huh?" Goofy walked toward a cannon and saw a note tied, "A present for the booty pirates!"

"*Bloody* pirates," Donald corrected him.

"Aseles!" Sora cupped his hands next to his mouth, shouting out in the distance toward every direction, "Where is she?" Donald could only shrug.

"Maybe she's at the dock," Goofy suggested, pointing forward. Sora, Donald, and Goofy then saw a town in the distance, their eyes widening to see...it was rather different than what they had anticipated, more raw in appearance.

"We've never been to this world?" Sora asked. Donald and Goofy shook their heads. Sora caught something at the side as he spotted a hanging sign above on the top step of the staircase, "Port...Royal?"

NORMAL POV:

Aseles coughed and made her eyes flicker, feeling completely drenched from head to toe as her arms and legs became numb from the long swim. She trotted out of the water and collapsed onto the sandy shore as she drank in the cold air, heaving deep intakes of air. Finally, she turned onto her knees, her arms gripping each other as her teeth chattered and feeling the strands of hair stick against her face and neck. Steadily and slowly, she stood as she pushed her feet against the sand, soon stepping onto the solid floor of brick and into the alien town.

It wasn't like any other world, and it looked old and damp with the shops and windows closed for the full moon night. The moon's rays radiated among the brick ground and swinging board signs, and she looked up one sign to read it said Blacksmith. However, she knew Sora, Donald and Goofy were not nearby, which only worried her that much more. Before she could stop walking, she heard a thump and froze.

Aseles swung her trembling arm, her keyblade flashing out in defense as her eyes averted to the deep shadows of the alleys. At the side a shadow loomed, taking the form of a human. She lowered her keyblade slightly and saw a man coming through into the dim shadow part of the building. He was bald, with a dark beard and dark eyes, and wore a sleeveless shirt, though a crooked, menacing smile put Aseles on edge.

"Who are you?" Aseles demanded.

The man halted in his tracks and just merely laughed. Aseles picked up her keyblade further, but she had spoken to soon as her pupils shrank from the sight. Her blood stopped, but no scream had the courage to erupt. It was too much to handle, because as the man stepped out of the shadows, all she saw was a skeleton with the same clothes hit by the moonlight. His skull was grotesque with wounds, just a couple of holes under his eyeballing eyes and his broken teeth. He had no lips to weaken that frightening sight, bony knees, broken skeleton toes, and a cracked skeleton skull.

The skeleton made no hesitation to head toward her, sword in his hand. Aseles smacked her keyblade against his sword, and quickly swung her keyblade over her head, smacking continuously against the man, but no matter how many hits she made...the man would not back down. With no other choice, Aseles began to flee, panting as she ran up the hill, unsure of the gruesome man's whereabouts. Finally over a brick bridge, Aseles sighed deeply, quite sure she had gotten away. She began to make her way steadily down the dirt hill, wondering what kind of world would hold walking skeletons as residents.

Unexpectedly, a series of voices shouted from the distance past the bridge as Aseles sped her pace up, now in a quiet run as she crouched slightly down. She ducked behind a tall pile of wooden boxes and barrels, and squint her eyes past the gaps of the boxes to see she was looking at a pier.

Sora, Donald and Goofy faced a group of skeleton men of their own, Pete amazingly in the scene with a particular, distinctive man standing beside him. The man had a long grey beard, reaching to the top of his chest with grey, frizzy hair sparking from underneath his leather rough hat, topped off with a feather. His poise was definitely bold and proper, a dark coat hanging over his shoulders, green piercing eyes, and brown leather boots.

"These are the twerps that I told you about!" Pete shouted and pointed to Sora and the others as they readied themselves for the ambush surrounding them. The man in the leather hat simply stroked his beard, a wicked smirk on his face.

"Who are you calling a twerp?!" Donald argued back.

"Hey....Weren't there four of ya...?" Pete said back, his fingers up as he counted. "Aw, looks like she chickened out!" Pete shouted back, giving a grin. The nerve of this guy....

Aseles gritted her teeth and jumped onto the barrels, "What did you say?!" Pete looked over, but he quickly backed up, clearing his throat.

"Aseles!" Sora and the others shouted. Aseles jumped down from the barrels and landed right next to Goofy, ready with her keyblade swinging in hand. The pirate beside Pete lingered his gaze to her while the other skeleton men began to dart their eyes on the new addition to the attack. Suddenly behind, a woman with dirty blond hair, strapped in a airless dress was beginning to be hauled onto the dock, her arms clamping against the arm that restrained her cries for help. Sora and Aseles prepared themselves as Donald and Goofy poised themselves to defend, all four shooting their gaze at Pete.

"Who's chickening out now?" Sora taunted.

"Hey, what gives?" Pete yelled with a shaking fist.

"Don't just stand there, go after them!" ordered the pirate with the feathered hat. His crew yelled in anger with swords and pistols at hand. The pirate with the lady and the rest started to follow their captain and Pete, walking away with the woman's screams fading as she finally was unable to release the hold from her mouth. At the end of the dock stood a ship with ebony sails, ready to leave port.

"Hey!" Aseles ran forward, but she was instantly met with clashing swords. Sora immediately came to her other side as the two spun accordingly around each other, fending off the clashing metal. Shootings rang out as Sora held out his keyblade protectively in front, spinning his keyblade like a rapid windmill that deflected all of the bullets off. The moon's light burst to full effect as the men now approached with swords instead.

Aseles gritted her teeth behind closed lips, charging and swinging her keyblade hastily across, then back, down, up, left right, but still to no result of winning. She suddenly met the slash of a blade, her hand instantly springing to grip the wound as the gush of blood began to fall. Her face flinched from the sting and felt the world spin, the intoxicating spell of blood reaching her flaring nostrils. Her head spun around as it then met a dark void, feeling the dirt among her body. Her eyesight suddenly turned into a deep crimson as she gasped for air, but abruptly found herself being pulled under intense pressure.

*They are the ones manipulating you.*

Aseles shot her eyes open, gasping as she faced the warm ground. The air lurked among her sweaty face as she gripped onto her stomach as the first instinct, but she was surprised to find a bandage around. She hauled herself to sit up with legs stretched out before her, her chest slowly inhaling and exhaling.

The boiling rage began to build as Aseles stared at her hands in disbelief of her sudden blackout. The one thing she thought she could control....-

Aseles shot her eyes up, lifting them to look around the lit room that consisted of some sort of cabin. There was a wooden desk dead center of the room, with several appliances of books, compasses, maps and candles set among the area. Her eyes darted toward the wooden door, her body instantly standing to head over to it and opening it. Aseles unsteadily walked up the stairs, taken aback that she was now on top of the deck of a ship. Nearby, Sora, Donald and Goofy caught her sight, and began to head over with two other men suddenly behind them. Aseles did not recognize them...but the raging boil within her blood made her pay no mind to the strangers, despite...one of them looking like a pirate.

"Aseles, you're alright," Sora walked and stood in front. Aseles shot her eyes up to him, and the raging bull within her began to emerge.

"Aseles?" Goofy asked, concerned.

"I'm done," she whispered, opening her palm. The keyblade flashed in her hand, and she gripped it tightly.

"What? What are you-" Aseles interrupted Sora as she chuckled the keyblade across the floor on the deck of the ship, seeing it roll and scatter to a stop.

"I'm done! I don't want it anymore!" Aseles yelled, staring at the trio.

"What?" Sora's mouth dropped.

"I don't...want to carry that....that THING around anymore," Aseles gritted her teeth with the flesh of her palms being dug by inserting nails. Sora stood with mouth gaped open as was Donald and Goofy. This whole aspect of wielding a keyblade, with no recollection of anything, was a sickening feeling. There was no purpose for it, no purpose.

She stood in utter, deadly silence, not really knowing what to do at this point, but nevertheless, her mind raced to make a move, to not take back everything that she said; she felt the push of one foot

forward, then the other, and then the first foot again. She was beginning to walk away, and then she was running down the walking ramp of the parked ship, rushing down the boarded walk of the pier.

No objections halted her run as she then found herself passing the brick bridge and on toward the deserted town again. Her breath grew short and ragged as her arms began to swing, her hair bouncing on her back as she dared not to stare back. After a few moments, she stopped, standing in the middle of a clearing. She kicked the dirt and let out an angry yell, gripping her hair with her firm fingers as her forehead shined of hot sweat. Her face slammed into her cold hands, her footsteps wonky as she found herself kneeling down on the edge of the sandy floor.

*My offer will stand open....but not for long.*

Aseles picked up her head, and saw something flash at the corner of her eye. She blinked, looking to see something glittering in the sand, looking almost like a bulky coin, the aura around it possessing and luring. Her hand reached for it, but she pulled back, unsure of this thick aura around it....and instead leaned downward, tilting her head at it instead.

The coin held a skull-shape in the middle, numerous triangles engraved around it. Its skull shined, and Aseles looked about, wondering who could've dropped it. Without a second thought, Aseles began to reach forward, the edge of her finger feeling the very edge of it. A shock burst from the contact, and Aseles stepped back, gasping at the flight of surging pulses among her muscles. She shivered as she looked back to the coin, unable to resist the hold it had on her. With a grim line on her face, her hand soon slammed into it, and this time, the coin exploded into nothing but stinging agony.

A piercing cry and scream loomed across the town as the color scheme turned from red, to black, then red again. Aseles gripped her head with her right arm was shot out to the side forcefully, twitching uncontrollably. To her complete horror, the coin began to tremble into her skin, patching itself as the blood around it pushed back, sending her brain in a burst of incorrect actions. Her body flailed around as the bone began to break, the blood unable to contain itself as it began to drop among her skin. She fell back as her right arm continuing to be held out, her feet rolling and kicking at the boarded floor. Her hair flew to and fro around her head, her neck burning.

Daring to open her eyes, Aseles merely whined at the horror she was bearing witness to; her keyblade had flashed back into view, its handle looming beside the upper part of her right arm. The tears flowed rapidly down her face as the side of the keyblade began to merge itself within her arm. Her arm shot a color of ebony as the handle began to mold into her shoulder, all the pressure simply unbearable as she launched her head against the ground with her mouth releasing a silent, deafening scream. Finally gave into the event, she lay limp and was unable to push away the pain. There was a sharp snap, and she let out a ragged, distorted cry, motionless as she began to hear the sound of rushing footsteps from somewhere nearby, but unable to concentrate where it was coming from. Who was there?

Sora's face emerged from above as he was kneeling over Aseles, helping her as he picked her head with a delicate grip. Unable to withhold her curiosity, Aseles blinked, and found the grotesque transformation of her right arm, with the veins of her skin connecting to the neck of the keyblade. It was pure black and dry, and it felt heavy and filled with something evil and darkened. At her shoulder, she felt the coin, embedded deep within her flesh.

"Aseles, what happened to you?!" Sora's eyes darted back and forth, his hands holding onto her shoulders as he began to gently sit her up. Aseles's body groaned from the movement, and she dropped her head back, her arm scrapping against the ground.

Aseles looked up to him, feeling his hand move her hair out of her crying eyes, "I'm sorry...I sh-

shouldn't have."

"Aseles, c'mon, you have to stand up," Sora replied, trying to heave her body up.

*They are the ones manipulating you.*

"I can't...." Aseles shook her head. "I don't know what I'm here....I don't know who to trust."

"You can trust us...we're your friends," Sora's eyes pleaded, his teeth grinding against each other. He grunted as he was able to heave Aseles up, wrapping her left arm over his shoulders. Aseles slouched forward, but she regained her footing somewhat as Sora looked over to her.

"You're going to be alright....trust me," Sora replied, beginning to walk her back toward the dock.

LATER:

The sky was navy and dark, the moon grimly above the sails of the creaking, shifting sails. Aseles had seated her next to one of the gentleman from before, named Will Tuner.

"You were trying to save that woman?" Aseles looked over to him, but quickly looked away, shifting in her seat. Her keyblade-arm was hard to maneuver, and she grunted every few minutes when she tried to make it as comfortable as possible, but simply only slumped her shoulder, letting her arm in whatever position it got to beside her.

"Indeed, but I was attacked by these vicious monsters. I've never seen them in my life, and those pirates that took her away," the man finished, "I can only wonder why they turned to skeletons...."

Elizabeth Swaan, the woman who was taken away by the pirates earlier, seemed highly important to him, and he had mentioned they had known each other since childhood, but what made Aseles curious was why he was willing to team up with the other man, Captain Jack Sparrow, who had been locked away as punishment for...who knows what. Okay, the fact that he was in jail made Aseles uncomfortable, but Will believed that....Jack Sparrow would lead him to the ship that had taken Elizabeth.

"Aseles." Aseles shot her eyes up, seeing Sora heading to the two. "Can I talk to you...in private?"

Will immediately stood up, nodding with a small smile, "Of course." Sora nodded to his leave as Will began to walk up the steps leading to the wheel of the moving ship. Aseles followed, seeing Jack taking the helm of the wheel, with his eyes directed forward in concentration with his compass flicking open at his hand.

Sora walked forward as he helped Aseles stand up, motioning her to face the railing of the ship. Aseles looked ahead, seeing the dark waves flickering off the moon's light. She sighed heavily, rubbing her face with her free hand as her right simply lay flat against her side.

"What is it, Sora?"

"I think it's time for me to tell you....what happened. Maybe you're not ready, but it's happened numerous times already, and I can't let that happen anymore," Sora replied.

Aseles slowly looked to him, but nodded slowly, "I understand."

"I'm guessing...you don't remember, but back in Disney Castle, you turned into something...very.....possessed. You handled yourself well, defended and fought with much strength, but the fact that you try to attack others...it's not good."

“...I’ve...attacked you guys?” Aseles blinked, her eyes widening.

“...Not often but....” Sora rubbed the back of his neck, leaning his elbows against the railing of the ship. Aseles stared at him, seeing the shadow of his eyes loom over the rest of his face. He sighed deeply, and turned to look at her directly, “You need to control it....this is a serious matter. If you can’t....someone will get hurt.”

LATER:

Night had finally fallen completely over the ship and covered the sky with droplets of stars. Exhaustion began to creep among Aseles’s body, but the idea of sleeping was not welcomed. In the cabin, she felt warm and awkward, with her keyblade-arm resting on her bent knees; it throbbed slightly as she gripped onto the neck of it with her left palm, stopping herself from trembling. Everyone else was settled easily around the cabin, Jack closest to her as he looked among the maps on the desk with Will sitting on a chair. Donald, Goofy and Sora sat on the floor near the center of the room and facing toward Aseles’s direction. This ambiguous feeling only grew frantically, but Aseles dared not to look up to see who was staring at her. The thought of even standing up and leaving was far from her mind.

Jack had set course for Island Muerta in hopes of catching the Black Pearl where Elizabeth had taken prisoner into, and up the stairs Aseles could see and feel the scene of fog settling in, and hope the ship would not crash into anything. Aseles felt herself trembling every now and then, unable to withstand the sight of her arm, and the further they approached the destination, Aseles continued to feel dread. She stared at the deep complexions that were engraved on the dark, charcoal keyblade, but couldn’t help but wonder why in the world it attached to her arm like that. Was it just solely based on the coin?

For once, Aseles regretted taking the proposal of joining Sora and the others, and couldn’t help but think would could she be doing if she had stayed with Leon and the rest of the Hollow Bastion Committee. The recollection of losing her home and the constant badgering of the Organization began to prick at her feelings, and she couldn’t help but feel....angry, disappointed.

“Well....since no one is saying anything, I might as well just ask it. We’re all thinking it, I’m sure,” the man named Jack turned to Aseles’s direction, “How in blazes did you get attached to that thing?”

Aseles lowered her face, clearing her throat, “I’m not sure.....it just did.” As if the fates teamed up against her, the reminiscing of her hidden secrets began to build. This man hinted something further.

"Are you, in other words, keeping the truth only to yourself darling?" Aseles slowly looked up to him, feeling her throat lurching from his persistence. “What is that on your arm, love?” Aseles saw his eyes dart immediately to her shoulder, and she quickly slammed the view of it with her left hand. It wasn’t long before everyone else’s eyes directed to her direction, though that did not stop the pirate to approach, now standing in front of her as she quickly stood, trying to pull her arm back from his grasp.

"Let me see," Jack commanded and pulled her arm up, making her stumble forward. She found herself leaning forcefully against Jack’s shoulder, feeling his squeeze tighten as his other hand trailed up the length of the weapon, studying her arm. Sora was the first to stand beside Jack, his face collected as he looked at the pirate, then at the arm he had seized. Aseles grew scarlet and watched Jack's fingers stop at her shoulder. His fingers circled the spot and his eyes squinted.

"Where did you get that medallion?" Jack narrowed his eyes.



"What is it?" Sora demanded. Oh no.

"Where did you get this medallion?" Jack asked again, aiming his glare at Aseles.

"I found it at the shore....then I guess it just...got stuck," Aseles swallowed greatly. Jack blinked once, and then headed to Will, asking him something very briefly that she couldn't catch it. Sora, Donald and Goofy looked toward Aseles, feeling their jabbing, internal comments as Jack trotted his way back to her, something clutched in his hand. He pulled the small knife out of its sheath and pointed the sharp end toward her arm.

"Whoa, what are you doing?!" Aseles backed away.

"We need to take it out."

"No way!" No blood, no blood!!

"I just need to-"

"No!" Aseles shook her head, immediately shielding her shoulder with her free palm with a hard slap. "Isn't there another way to take it out that doesn't involve blood and knives?"

"We must take it out, unless you plan to have a freakish right arm for the rest of your life," Jack began, "If the coin is not taken out in time, it will only continue to grow its wicked nature upon you."

"This coin is cursed?" GREAT, only her, only her. So lucky.

Jack nodded, "We need to catch up to the Black Pearl, in order to-" Just then, the ship rocked hard to a stop as everyone stumbled in place, Jack catching Aseles before she fell forward.

"Are....we here? On Island Muerta?" Will asked, quickly standing up and running up the steps in haste. The other immediately followed behind as Jack glared at Aseles intently. Aseles gulped, but she quickly made her way up the stairs, skidding to a halt on the deck with wide eyes. The deck held Pete, and a great number of pirates surrounding the ship's exits. Then there was the pirate with the leather hat, holding a smug grin beside Pete. To the left was the Black Pearl.

The leader stopped a couple of yards away, "The coin calls to us....And we aren't leaving without it." Aseles immediately ducked behind Donald and Goofy, with Sora taking steps forward and flashing out his keyblade in view

"You want a fight, you got one!" Sora replied firmly. The head pirate laughed as his henchmen followed suite. He lifted his chin once, and the pirates suddenly began to move forward, stepping out of the shadows as the moon forced its way between the sails above. The army of bones with hanging clothes was nothing but chilling and grotesque.

The pirates let out a hefty yell and charged as the others immediately stood on the defensive, with Aseles blocking as she lifted her arm in front. The clangs of weapons gonged in her eardrums repeatedly followed by grunts and thuds to the floor. She dodged a pair of swords, ducking down and throwing a hard kick to the men as they rolled on their ankles. She swung her arm, surprised to see bolts of dark lightning surging at the head of it and pushing the men into the air and over the railing, crashing into the sea. The power was simply overwhelming, and....it hurt, terribly.

In the meantime, Sora, and Donald threw their share of spells, freezing, flaming and bolting any pirates that came into their fighting, angry range as Goofy sent a few flying overhead and scattering them to mere bones. Will proved noble in his techniques of swordsmanship as Jack was only fighting just one, the pirate leader.

Aseles suddenly found herself thrown onto the deck floor, groaning as her knees gave way with the pressure riding up her back and spine. The action to stand was unforgiving to her arm, feeling its monstrous spell begin to take her nerves captive. Sora was quick to appear at her side, but was only kicked aside, groaning.

"Sora!" Aseles threw herself forward, but only to be caught in strong arms, and being pulled back. Her hair flew back on her head as she watched Sora being dragged backwards, being tied up along with Goofy and Will. The leading pirate suddenly appeared beside, gripping Aseles's infected arm as she grunted in pain, squirming as she tried to push him off.

"It seems like you have me medallion. lass. You're coming with us," the man replied lowly as Donald and Jack were then tied up in the same fashion as the others. Pete, who had hid behind a pile of barrels, was now stacking barrel upon barrel around the deck, the few pirates left helping him with the cargo. Oh no.

"Tie her up," the man pushed her to the ground as she grunted, finding the curve of her elbow around the neck of the poisoned keyblade. She kicked frantically, shouting in anger as she was now picked up, facing the pirate once more.

"Pleased to meet your acquaintance. I be Captain Barbosa, young lass" he sneered. He slammed his knee against her stomach as her mouth flew open, the air in her lungs jerked out. She gasped and heaved as she fell to the floor in shallow gasps, kicking her feet forcefully.

"So- Do-" the voice ceased in her throat, meeting Barbosa's kick in the face.

\*\*\*\*\*

*"Are you still thinking of my proposal?"*

*Aseles stirred, grunting as she tried to open her eyes, but the room proved to be too much bright to withstand. She shut her eyes, trying to shield her face, but the light continued to protrude.*

*"Aseles....what will it take for you to see the truth? We need you....and you need us."*

*"Goofy....Sora....Donald..." Aseles grunted.*

*"They do not need you, not as much as we do. They only expect you to follow orders while we....we will follow your path to greatness. You seek answers like we do....we will help you anyway we can. We will give you resources, we will give you strength."*

*"Why should I believe you...? What....tells me that you will give me everything I need?"*

*"...You don't."*

Aseles jerked in place as her eyes shot open, looking up at the dim ceiling. She felt something hard against her back as she turned, seeing a wooden desk propped up against the back of her body. The cabin was lit with a swinging lantern near the set of doors in front as they lit a bowl of apples on top of a table. Beside it was a figure, crawling out of the shadows. Aseles blinked to get a better look, and realized it was the woman from before. Her wrists seemed to be tied up, and she was walking along the ground on her knees. Aseles grunted, trying to pull forward, but found she was completely bonded with the table itself.

Well....tying up the ladies never seemed to get old.

"Are you feeling well?" Elizabeth asked, looking closely at Aseles. Aseles looked at her for a

moment, remembering that she was kicked in the face after Barbossa and infiltrated the bombed ship. Aseles could only hope that....Sora and the others were able to get away.

She looked at Elizabeth again, seeing her shiny, light brown eyes reflect the moon's light from the back windows. She moved her dirty blond hair out of her face as best as she could, but that attentive look on her face grew much more. Aseles questioned her stare, but quickly looked at a mirror near the floor at the far side of the room. Squinting her eyes, she observed that the infected keyblade's curse was now covering half of her face, almost looking dull and dry to the touch. The scales overlapped one another, rounding around her eye with the corner of it beginning to crease and bulge in pink.

"What....Where are we?" she looked toward the woman.

"We're on the Black Pearl," she answered back, "Who are you?"

"I'm....Aseles. You must be Elizabeth," Aseles grunted, trying to release her binds.

"How do you know my-"

"Will."

"William Turner?"

Aseles nodded, "He's looking desperately for you. But...why did they take you?" She blinked, but then she swung something into view, and hanging around her neck was a gold chain, holding a skull coin. Its surface shined brightly against the moon's light.

Aseles's mouth dropped, "You...have a medallion."

"They want this, and Will's blood. That's why I'm here...I've told them I was his father's daughter, and now they believe I do have the blood to be repaid."

"T-The blood to be repaid??" Aseles gulped. "What does that mean?"

Elizabeth grew a grim line on her lips, "...It's not good news."

Sora's POV:

"Are you sure that's where they're headed?" Sora asked. "We only have one shot to make this right." The others followed among the ship's wheel, with the barrel of gunpowder now off the ship before they had detonated them to oblivion.

Jack took head of the wheel, looking off into the distance with his compass back in hand again, "Indeed lads, hopefully you get there in time...or it won't be good news."

"What do you mean? Elizabeth is with them," Will interjected. Sora stood silently with the others, waiting for Jack's orders. Jack then steered the wheel into the direction and gave direction on what needed to be fixed on the deck.

"We'll have both loves safe," Jack added.

Sora knew it was best to think of the positive outcome of bringing both back and safely....but he just wasn't sure how. It seemed that Aseles was questioning herself too much in the aspect of their journey, and right now wasn't the best time to do as such, noticing that not only was her life in danger, but also Elizabeth's. Was it her insecurity, or something else that was driving her toward rejection of the keyblade?

Then, this odd feeling toward Aseles was reminiscing, and as much as he would like to know what it was, Sora had no clue. Why was he thinking this way? Aseles....was different. Something was hidden there....he saw it every time he looked at her.

“Don’t do anything drastic,” Sora whispered to himself, tugging roughly at the ropes and making sure they were secure.

# Trust

## ASELES'S POV:

"OW!" Aseles was pushed onto the deck, facing Barbossa's feet. She cracked an eye open up to him, knowing her chances of escaping were slimming as the seconds ticked by. Her keyblade-arm was now stinging, and she wasn't sure how long it would be until the effects were permanent, or deadly.

"Look at er' face captain!" someone yelled out. Aseles was gripped from the back of the head, grunting as Barbossa's eyes sliced through the air to look at her directly, one shining apple twirling in his hand. Barbossa approached as he stared curiously to her, and gripped her keyblade-arm, pulling her shoulder up to view. Aseles winced, and then felt the grip of her face with his nails digging into her flesh.

"What is it that makes you like this Miss...?" Barbossa asked, his hand retreating, "It cannot just possibly be the work of me medallion." Aseles stood on wobbling feet now, gripped from the back of her shirt. On second thought...Aseles should've had Jack take it out when he had the chance. It seemed such a mild action, compared to what this leech pirate would do.

"Answer the question, Miss," Barbossa demanded this time, his cold eyes in the shadows of his hat. Night was slowly approaching its end, and it would be a death if Sora didn't get here by tomorrow.

"Take her in the cabin," Barbossa pushed her toward the mirthful crew as they grabbed her by the arms, leading her down the cabin doors. Aseles was tossed inside as she hit the floor, her keyblade-arm smacking right against the boarded floor. Aseles yelped briefly, shutting her eyes as she curled up. It hurt so much...it was like nerve.

Elizabeth came to her side, "What happened?"

"They're planning something, something really bad," Aseles trembled. "I think they're going to cut my arm off."

## SORA'S POV:

"Are we there yet, Jack?" Sora asked, rubbing his head lightly. He looked up to see Jack watching his compass carefully. Jack then looked out at sea. A grin did not cross his face.

Jack shook his head, "We'll get there by morning." Jack then ordered Will to take the wheel. Jack started to walk down the steps and headed in the cabin. Sora was soon sliding off the railing, and following right behind Jack. Sora closed the doors behind him, reassuring that he and Jack were alone to speak.

"Are you only going to help us because of the Pearl?" Sora asked. Jack sat on a chair, and looked at Sora questionably.

"Pretty much," Jack answered, but he suddenly stood up, his eyes narrowing, "but nothing good will end for your friend, or that damsel of Will's."

"Why is that?" Sora answered back.

"Because," Jack began as he walked around the room, looking at the shelves. "For if we don't find the Pearl lad, or her in the next couple of hours, I'll be guessing that she will be dead by then..."

Sora leaned on the wall, silent, but alert of what he had heard, "Why would they kill her?"

"One fact: she has that medallion entrusted her strange arm. The blood has to be repaid; and I'm sure they'll be using all of her blood just to be sure."

"Oh, here's the rum!" Jack grabbed a big bottle that was on a shelf. He took off the cap and took a huge swing of the liquid, feeling refreshed and only leaving half of the contents left.

Jack then released sigh as Sora kept attentive to the conversation, "She will be dead if we find her at the slow pace we are in, but we'll find her alive if you desperately want to." Jack then grabbed something in his coat and threw it toward Sora. Sora caught it with ease and held it up to his face with his two fingers. The red arrow spun in the compass, passing the three signals inside. It spun wildly as Sora looked at it closely. Did he really want to find Aseles, or did he want to find someone else that was more important to him: Kairi, or Riku?

"Check outside," Jack insisted.

Sora nodded and left the cabin doors open behind him after walking up the steps. He went to the middle of the deck and looked at the compass. The arrow stopped, but then continued to rotate. If it would help, Sora recalled back to the first time he met Aseles.... Those serene eyes staring back at him.

Finally, once realizing that the compass would not stop for any of those things, Sora closed out everything around him, and set his mind to the person that was most important to him, right at this moment. The compass stopped in a heartbeat, pointing off to the left side. Sora looked at that direction. He saw an island in the very far distance.

"Jack, is that it?" Sora yelled out. Jack came out and looked at the direction Sora was looking at.

Jack's eyes widened, "The Pearl is there." And without a doubt, there was a black figure at the distance. "Off the wheel, William!" Jack said, walking up the steps where Will was. Will nodded as Goofy and Donald ran to the railing where the Pearl was stationed in the distance. Sora let out a smile and closed the compass tight.

ASELES'S POV:

"Move it, poppy!" a pirate yelled, pushing Elizabeth and Aseles out of the cabin and onto the deck. Barbossa flashed into view, standing in front of Elizabeth, though Aseles was not planning on letting her go so easily, and stood in front of the woman.

"Move child," Barbossa demanded.

"You want to answer to her, you answer to me first," Aseles demanded right back.

"I told you once, I'll tell you again: move child," Barbossa demanded with a sharp voice. The cold seemed to drape around her shoulders. Elizabeth came forward, nudging her left shoulder. Aseles looked at her questionably, but she accepted her answer as Aseles stepped aside, looking at the floor. Barbossa then took out the necklace from Elizabeth's dress.

"You will accompany us, Miss Swann while your friend here gets to stay with me best men," Barbossa explained. A grin rose across his face as Elizabeth shot around. Aseles's eyes widened to see six men had surrounded her.

"No!" Elizabeth pounced, but she was hauled back with ease as she was thrown over the shoulder of a large pirate, and the two began to go down and over the ship into the lifeboat

"Get the medallion once you're done, but make sure there's lots of blood," Barbossa grinned. Aseles froze in place, but she immediately dashed to the side as the men followed in hot pursuit of her with Barbossa climbing into the lifeboat and sailing away to the island a mile away.

"Aseles!" Elizabeth cried as the rest of the men were hauled into the lifeboats. The panic began to swell inside her as Aseles faced the elongated swords and cocking pistols. Holy crap, she was going to die.

One charged as Aseles rolled to the side, and managed to slide out of the huddle formed in the middle of the deck. She bolted up the stairs, careful not to trip as her arms were pinned behind her. Pirates ran from each side, cornering her at the dead center of the ship's bow. Two charged as Aseles swung her foot around, kicking one down and throwing the second back, seeing him flail about until he went over the wooden railing and into the sea.

The victorious atmosphere shattered as a man taller than the rest began to make his way toward her. Aseles looked swiftly to the wheel of the ship, hopping onto it and jumping onto the deck, hurriedly and painfully picking herself up as she mustered all the strength to keep fighting.

The ship rocked back and forth like a cradle, but Aseles tried her best to keep herself steady, eying the next man to charge to her with sword in hand. He swung vertically as Aseles dodged, grunting as she suddenly fell upon the ground. The man towered over her as Aseles gasped, but found her ankle stomped on, preventing her from kicking him away. The man held his blade up, and struck down against her keyblade-arm, making her wince and shout in pain. The medallion encrusted in her shoulder vibrated as Aseles kicked frantically, trying to pry the man off, but to no use.

"Get off!" Aseles shot her eyes up, almost screaming in happiness as she found Sora swinging on a rope, and kicking the man completely off of her, throwing him over the wooden railing..

"Sora!" she replied as she felt someone pick her up from behind, being Will as he began to saw away at the ropes that held her prisoner. After a second, the ropes fell off of her as Aseles breathed more easily, seeing Goofy, Donald and Jack handling the rest of the pirate crew.

"Aseles-" Will started, but she quickly pointed toward where the lifeboat had disappeared to.

"They took her, over there!" she replied. Will looked over and didn't waste time to jump out of the clean ship of pirates, swimming toward the island.

"We have to follow," Sora stated, looking at the rest. Aseles nodded along with Donald and Goofy as Jack fumbled in place, looking about the deck of the deserted Black Pearl.

"Jack let's go, you'll get your ship back! Promise!" Sora encouraged as Jack stood by the edge, hesitating it seemed as he held onto the ship's rim with twitching fingers. But eventually he jumped off first as the others followed behind him toward the shore line of where Will was now running into.

The water was cold, but once getting out was being in the snow without any clothes. Aseles rubbed her arms, desperate to feel warm as her teeth chattered. She struggled to keep up with the others, and felt the pulse of her arm radiate throughout her whole body. It had grown all over her stomach and going down one leg to the knee....

The gloomy platform was heading into a darkened entrance at the end, with Sora now in the lead as Jack kept right behind him in quick pace. Will was now in free, having stopped as Heartless blocked his view.

"Leave this to us!" Sora replied as he swung forward, catching one Heartless as the rest charged

for their fallen comrade. Aseles kept herself steady as she swung her arm around to her foes, seeing crackles of dark, lavender volts striking the Heartless, instantly turning them to dust. She stuck close by Will who seemed to have the most trouble, with her arm clashing against the Heartless as they soon fell to the ground, shaking uncontrollably before they met death. Aseles continued to be gruesomely surprised of her arms growing strength, but only to be terrified as she found the scales growing to surround her forehead and lips, all creasing along to the other side of her face.

The looks upon her did not cease as the battle against the Heartless was won, with Sora immediately training his eyes upon her. He swallowed roughly, then turned to look at Jack, catching everyone's attention.

"We have to hurry, there's no time to waste. Aseles, come," Sora replied, indicating Aseles to stand and stay close beside him. She did so, and the two were running ahead, with Aseles trying to contain her ragged breathing. It was getting harder to take in the air, and the more entrances they hit, the weaker she was getting. Finally the ground reached the clearing at the end, but to make matters worse, several henchmen of Barbossa were standing at the ready. Donald wasted no time in electrocuting them with Thundaga spells as Goofy swing his shield like a boomerang, cutting the skeletons in half as their bones fell to the ground, lifeless.

"Hurry!" Will replied as he cut off in the lead now, Aseles close behind with Sora gripped onto her left arm, making her keep up.

Inside, the cave walls were pressed with countless jewels and gold objects, all twinkling from the moon's rays above the opened rock rooftop. Barbossa was gripping Elizabeth furiously, positioning her wrist in front of him above a large chest as she tried to pull back, but to no avail.

"Get closer and Miss Swann will meet with Davy Jones!" Barbossa yelled out. In a quick swoop, the whole group was caught off-guard as Aseles felt the back of her shirt hauled, and her keyblade arm snapped behind her.

"Get the girl too!" Barbossa yelled out. Aseles felt herself being pushed forward, and she struggled as she shook her head to and fro.

"Let her go!" Sora shouted, grunting. The infection had taken complete coverage of her arms, legs, hand and fingers, leaving a dark purple color on them with the ebony swirling among it. Her hair began to thicken in dark charcoal as the stricken pain of being touched was abrupt and wicked, as if a thousand knives were thrown at her again and again.

Aseles picked up her head to find herself being hunched forward in front of the old chest, hundreds of medallions looming beneath her exposed neck. Beside Elizabeth's palm was cut nicely and quickly as Barbossa pushed her medallion into her palm, and let her release it into the bin. She was let go as Barbossa was quick to dispose of her behind him, throwing her into piles of treasure. Next, Aseles felt Barbossa's arm grab hold of hers, pulling her up to kneel in front of the large chest as the medallions waited to be reunited with the one in her shoulder. Barbossa pulled out his sharp sword, sliding it against the rim of the chest in excitement.

"Get away from her!" Donald shouted, his eyes piercing and raging with his arms struggling to be free. The rising of her chest intensified, and she began to feel the pull of being under, but this was more attentive, more.....

"I'm afraid I can't do that mate," Barbossa with a solid grin.

The sound in her ears went numb as she could not hear the sound of agony escape her lips. The sharp clank of metal against her head was unbearable, unknowing what was happening to the world. She felt being let go as she crunched up against the floor, thrashing as hundreds of treasure



pieces collided against her face. This wicked feeling, this total control of Darkness was not in her possession, but in the hands of the weapon that stood her up, showing itself completely to those in the cave.

SORA'S POV:

"What's happening to her?!" Goofy yelled out, his shield defensively out in front of him. Donald did the same with his wand as Sora stood there, dumbfounded out of his wits as the group was immediately let go. Aseles lay on the floor of gold and diamonds, curled inward like a human ball. Sora's eyes caught the dangerous transformation among her being, her eyes shut tightly as her hair grew to a dark black, like dirty charcoal. Suddenly, it turned pitch-black, with her skin gruesomely purple and pulsing, and her clothes dimming from their original colors. She was sitting up, her knees pressing against each other with her face hunching forward. Even Barbossa took a step back from her appearance. Her breathing was heavy and full, and frightening....

"Aseles?" Sora asked, walking forward a couple of paces, making the mountain of treasure go into a land slide. He got closer, cautious, "Ase-" Sora was cut off by Aseles shooting up from the ground and onto her feet. Her keyblade gave a terrible sound of a rusty clank against a chalkboard. Aseles stretched her arm in a flash, ripping the thick air like it was floss. Sora backed a step away, but regained his strength.

"Goofy, Donald, get them out of here," Sora stated, barely enough to hear.

"Sora-" Donald started, but Sora interrupted him with a glare. The others nodded and started to run, but Barbossa stood his ground to where he was.

Sora looked at him, "Don't you dare leave, and we're not through."

Barbossa gave an angry scowl, "Don't you taunt me boy!" Aseles suddenly turned to face Barbossa herself, her eyes sealed against her skin. Aseles finally opened her eyes, revealing sharp blooded pupils, looking at Barbossa directly.

"Don't you dare taunt me child! I've had enough from the both of you!" Barbossa yelled at Aseles. Aseles just stood with her arm extended, standing very innocently, as if she didn't understand a word Barbossa was saying. Aseles suddenly went toward him, walking slowly in steps. Barbossa took out his sword but before the tip could leave the sheath, Aseles ran in lightning speed, striking Barbossa with her black razor-sharp keyblade. Barbossa stood still, Aseles' arm inside his guts, her other arm useless and by her side. Barbossa's face froze in fear and death, falling clumsily in front of Aseles. Aseles backed away, pulling her arm in a swift move, making Barbossa fall on his face with the bones of his skeleton completely dismantled and beyond repair. Sora looked at her keyblade, and then shot to Aseles's own expression, knowing full well that despite being friends, Sora had to stop her.

Barbossa laid by her feet, green liquid coming out of his body and mouth, spilling everywhere, almost like spilling poison on a clean surface. Aseles suddenly turned toward Sora, looking at his blue, gentle eyes directly. Sora readied himself for the worst, flashing out two keyblades instead of his usual one; one was held on his palm firmly while the other rotated like a speeding clock in the other. His clothes turned blue and he slid from side to side as his shoes were shined by blue light, giving him the ability to move as if the floor were slippery. His eyes were bright blue now, trying to find a way to free Aseles from the medallion's cruse.

He suddenly moved to his left, dodging Aseles' attack by inches. He swung a keyblade at her, but she kicked off the ground, her eyes targeting Sora like a missile. She flew toward Sora, but he dodged and swung both of his keyblades toward Aseles. She flew to the sky again, Sora taking the evasive chance. He launched a spell forward, yellow bolts shooting toward Aseles, hitting her

perfectly. Aseles fell on a mountain of treasures, all still in the dim cave. He slid toward her and swung his keyblade at her but she suddenly disappeared. Sora's instincts went to max and he moved swiftly to the right, keeping his feet to go in a circle as Aseles was persistent to keep up, catching up to him. He stopped and swung his keyblade, striking the floor and picking his legs from the ground, kicking Aseles into the air. She flew upside down, and then stood straight in the air, locating Sora swiftly. She went straight forward toward him, her arm in contact with Sora's keyblades. Sora looked straight up at her eyes, seeing her eyes held water in them. Wait, what?

"Run...." Aseles whispered, breaking the tense silence between the two. Sora struggled with Aseles, his eyes widening at the sight. She did not want to fight; the medallion was demanding her to.

He backed away and struck forward, missing Aseles as she went to his side. She swung her arm at him, but he blocked just in time and his other keyblade went toward her arm, touching down permanently to her infected arm. She stood frozen, her keyblade pointing right at his face. Sora gave his key a big turn and the medallion came out, and for sure, the blood spewed among its release. Aseles fell on the floor as Sora went to the chest with the hundreds of medallions inside it. Sora grabbed Elizabeth's medallion and placed Will's blood from Will's knife on it, then dropping it in the chest with Aseles's, turning to see what was happening to her.

#### ASELES'S POV:

Her first glimpse was seeing thin rivers of water touching her lower lids, evading around the tips of her fingers. She groaned and blinked, looking among the piles of gold, catching her reflection on a curved goblet. Lying still, she began to regain her vision slowly as she spotted her blue irises, her skin falling back to their tanned color. She slowly sat up, touching her face and felt that the grotesque scales were no longer present, and then she looked toward her right arm. It no longer held the infected keyblade, and she saw the body of it lay beside her, with the face of its Darkness shredding away and melting into the air. The keyblade flashed and disappeared, leaving Aseles a sense of relief. She began to stand up, wobbling in place but straightened up as she looked to Sora, seeing him approaching her hesitantly. His eyes were pale, but it wasn't long until he smiled.

"It...happened again....didn't it?" she started first.

Sora's smile dropped, "Yes it did."

"Are...are you alright?" she asked slowly, unsure if she was speaking correctly.

"Not much damage," Sora replied, "But we'll talk later. We'll have to get that chest out of here first."

#### MOMENTS LATER:

It didn't take long until she felt ashamed about the whole chain of events leading up to the incident of the cave. Everyone seemed exhausted from the whole ordeal, and Aseles couldn't quite look at the trio of boys. The trip in the gummi ship was going to be loooong, you felt it, and she felt it. She looked at the floor, kicking it with a foot on the boarded deck of the Black Pearl.

Will placed a hand on Aseles's shoulder, catching her attention, "Thank you, for protecting Elizabeth."

"Of course," Aseles replied with a nod. Aseles looked to see Donald and Goofy meeting her gaze, but they quickly smiled and looked away. Aseles cringed from the action, and she hunched her head down, slapping a hand to her face as Will and Elizabeth left her alone.

With Jack driving his ship, he took the time to find a random spit on the middle of the ocean, letting the ship rest on the waving sea. The group began to head toward the chest they had heaved from the island, and began to set it on the railing with Aseles making sure her fingers didn't get caught underneath it.

Sora held it steady, looking to everyone, "So, are we going to push this thing over?"

"And hope no one ever finds it? Yes, gladly," Will replied.

"Then I say we all do the honors, eh mates?" Jack replied, slamming his hands against the front side of it. Goofy counted up to three as everyone hauled their weight against it, looking over the railing to see the cursed chest drowning into the large splash it made, riding down out of sight into the darkness of the ocean's mouth.

Aseles stared at it, feeling that she was the one that pushed it the hardest, grateful it was gone.

AT PORT ROYAL:

"Guess this is our stop," Sora broke the silence.

"I suppose it is, but so glad the nightmare is over," Elizabeth replied.

"Well-I hope we will see each other again," Jack said, "But before you go..." he walked toward Sora, "I want that sword of yours." Sora looked at him plaintively as Aseles raised an eyebrow, surprised to see a grin on Sora's face.

"Alright," Sora suddenly handed him the keyblade. Jack held it briefly as Donald and Goofy waited patiently, looking at Sora questionably. Was Sora really going to give it up that easily? Before she could ask, the keyblade disappeared from Jack's hand and went back to Sora's.

"I see," Jack said with a smirk on his face, "Clever, sailor."

"Hey, you might be able get it," Will assumed, making everyone look at him.

"How?" Donald asked.

"Well, first thing, Sora and Jack are a lot alike," Will chuckled.

Jack and Sora looked at each other, "Do not!" they both yelled.

"You best scurry off mates," Jack replied, waving his hand dismissively to the group.

"Alright, alright....the ship is yours, Captain," Sora replied, waving off as Donald, Goofy and Aseles followed behind him. On the dock, Jack began to make sail off with his ship as Will and Elizabeth waved goodbye to him along with the four. Soon, they bid their farewell, and Sora began to head up towards a brick staircase at the far left. Aseles walked up the stone steps with ease, and soon climbed up the ladder that led to the flat roof, the gummi ship arriving from the distance.

"We have to head back to Hollow Bastion," Sora responded, glancing at his group. Aseles blinked, but didn't question the motive for going there, though rest seemed very nice.

Taking their seats, Aseles buckled herself in as the gummi ship was now rising into the air, and shooting off into the galaxy. She rested her chin in her hand, seeing the passing stars in front of her. A heavy weight lifted off the base of her chest, glad to feel that last bit of Darkness was out of her way. However....Cloud's prediction on her seemed right on...and she worried about it. She

had Darkness...and she didn't even know it.

FFW:

Sora, Donald, Goofy, and Aseles started to head through the Market Place, grabbing some ice cream along the way. The walk toward Merlin's Study was very silent, and it somewhat ticked Aseles off, knowing that something was being said behind her back. She caught glance of the trio briefly, but they seemed to be turning away with every glance she gave them, despite them trying to make it seem discreet.

Once finishing her treat, Aseles pushed her hands in her pockets, scowling as she dropped her gaze. They were headed to Merlin's Study as everyone else finished their treats and Sora knocking on the door. The four waited for a response and the door opened with Leon in the doorway.

"Hey, Leon," Sora greeted. Leon nodded with a smile as he stepped aside for them to enter. Yuffie, Cid, and Merlin were also in the room, talking amongst themselves until the four entered.

"Hey, how's it going guys?" Yuffie came up, beaming greatly.

"Going good, no Organization yet," Donald replied. At their mention, Aseles felt herself stiffen, gritting her teeth behind her closed mouth.

"Sora," Leon suddenly said, signaling Sora to come with him. Sora nodded and they both headed out the door. Aseles watched them leave, feeling super self-conscious.

"How you doing, kid?" Cid started with Aseles.

Aseles blinked to him, nodding slowly, "Um, better..."

"You sure?" Yuffie questioned. Aseles briefly looked to Donald and Goofy, noticing that none of them were mentioning the incident that had happen in that island. After seeing Barbossa's corpse....

"You look a little tired," Merlin exclaimed, his hand at his beard.

"A bit," Aseles admitted, smiling nervously. The issue wasn't pressed another further as Aseles headed to a nearby chair, sitting with her arms crossed. Donald and Goofy headed over toward Merlin, asking some news about their King, which made Aseles cringe....again, glad to know that Yuffie kept herself busy with Cid with something about new programs.

Why had the keyblade chosen her?

And what was taking Sora and Leon forever to get back? What could they possibly be talking about?

SORA'S POV:

"What was it that brought you here, I know it's not a normal visit," Leon explained as he leaned on the wall with Sora doing the same at the opposite wall. They were in the Bailey, and Sora knew they had to talk privately and seriously, especially with Aseles not around.

"It's Aseles," Sora answered as he looked around.

"What about her?" Leon asked as he tilted his head at Sora's direction.

"She's becoming- I don't know," Sora answered, "I just can't trust her."

"What's wrong, you were kind of excited when she was going with you guys."

"Her power, it's too dangerous and risky."

"What do you mean?"

"We had an incident back at Port Royal...."

"Care to elaborate?"

"She...can kill," Sora replied simply. "What if...we can't control something like this next time?"

"Does that worry you, or does that scare you?"

"Huh?"

Leon sighed, "Are you worried because she can hurt someone, or are you just scared because she can actually kill someone, including you?" Sora stood silent as Leon continued, "So, tell me what I have in this."

"I need her to stay here; I can't have her traveling with us and leaving blood wherever we go. I'm asking a favor: will you keep her here?"

"You think she will take it lightly?"

Sora rolled his eyes, "Then what do you suggest Leon?"

"I expect her to control that power here at least."

"Will you help her?"

"No, not much, but Cloud can." Sora stood silent again, not knowing if he should accept the offer. Leon took a big breath and sighed, "You can either accept the bargain, or you can tell Aseles herself. Your choice."

It was there Sora noticed he had to take the offer. He himself couldn't tell Aseles she couldn't go....it felt wrong to leave her like this...but perhaps it was best if he wasn't the one to stop the trip for her. It would somehow feel....wrong if he did it himself. Everyone's safety on the trip was at play...and he knew he was going to lose if.....

"Alright....Deal."

FFW, ASELES'S POV:

"Take care, Aseles," Goofy patted her on the back.

"Don't get into trouble," Donald gave a smile as she simply nodded.

Sora came up next, "Aseles, I-"

"No, it's okay," Aseles replied firmly. He looked concerned, but agreed. He put his arms around her, giving her a hug as Aseles mildly returned it, then dropped her arms. It was warm and trusting at that moment, but as soon as he let go and started to head with Donald and Goofy to the gummi ship, it was the total opposite. The door closed behind him as Aseles was left in Merlin's Study with the rest of the Committee.

"Let's go find Cloud," Leon's broke her from her trance.

"Squall, give her a break," Yuffie interrupted. Leon looked at her, but then accepted her idea. He leaned against the wall as Merlin sat in his comfy chair, having a cup of tea on the table. Cid was sitting on the bed, his elbows on his knees as Yuffie sat in the chair beside Cid. It immediately grew awkward, Leon seeming to be waiting for something....

"Alright, why am I stuck here, just give it to me straight," Aseles broke the silence, turning her attention to Leon. The reason of Leon and the Hollow Bastion Committee needing her.....she knew it was the perfect lie.

"Why do you ask?" Leon pointed out.

"Because I know you're all lying to me."

"Sharp kid," Cid raised his eyebrow, thumbing to her as Yuffie shot him an annoyed glare.

"Shush," she hissed.

Leon sighed deeply, nodding once, "It was best to keep you here, until that power of yours is tamed and controlled." Aseles dropped her eyes to the floor. The feeling of being left alone....She knew it.

*They do not need you...*

"Why didn't he just tell me...?" Aseles perked her head up, staring intently at Leon.

"He didn't want to hurt your feelings," Leon replied. Aseles stared at him, but dropped her gaze as she began to make her way toward the door, pulling it open and then closing it with a thud behind her. She felt the flames of betrayal pick up at the ends of her hair as she hastily made her way toward the Bailey, walking in silence and feeling her teeth snap at each other, as if anger itself was taking control. The need to be alone, it was now lustful.

Up the steps she went, but she didn't stop there as she began to head down the Bailey, standing and plopping down to sit against the brick wall, a fountain trickling water beside her head. She shot her eyes up toward the top of the brick wall at her far right, remembering that was where Organization XIII had introduced themselves.

*She is of no value to you, but to us.*

Aseles held out her arm, and in a flash the keyblade appeared in her hand. She stared intently at it, her eyebrows furrowing in its direction.

"Argh!" she flung the weapon forward, making it clank against the wall in front of the enclosed space, seeing it rattle and lay still on the floor. She wrapped her arms around her knees, locking them together as she plopped her chin on top of them, blowing irritably at her bangs. Talk about feeling out of place.

"What are you doing here?" Aseles instantly recognized the voice, but didn't bother to turn to look at him.

"Nothing. Just sitting." Cloud approached as Aseles felt herself pale. Moments later, the keyblade disappeared into sparkles, leaving no trace of its existence.

"That's not true."

"Yes it is. I'm not doing anything, just sitting."

"You're thinking....." Aseles looked up to Cloud, seeing Cloud's cold eyes target on her face, "Leon told me everything. I suggest we start right now if you want your persistent thoughts out of your mind." She got up leisurely, patting off her backside and rear as she obediently followed Cloud up the steps.

Once inside the Bailey, Cloud headed to one of the balconies, looking over the edge, "Follow me." She watched Cloud jumped over it as she hurried forward, seeing Cloud land firmly onto the ground. She swallowed, already knowing Cloud's words before he replied, "Your turn."

Heights.....

Hesitantly she pushed her leg over the edge, and followed with the other with her hands gripped the ledge with clutching fingers. She blinked rapidly, and jumped downward, making sure to land on both feet. Though, she felt the haul of her shirt pulled back as she felt the ground graze across the tip of her feet. She exhaled deeply, Cloud resting her feet properly against the ground and letting go of her shirt.

"Before we concentrate on your power, I have to ask."

"Uh....really?" she gave a questioning look.

Cloud nodded, "What do you turn into? And be specific."

"Well, I don't turn into a creature or something. I'm not conscious when it happens...."

"Do you see anything out of the ordinary?"

"Umm....colors...I guess," Aseles shrugged. Cloud stared at her, a bit dumbfounded. "Um....say like you see something right now, but it's a different color. That's what...I see."

"Okay then, what colors can you turn into?" Ugh, the way he was asking was like if she were a five year old.

"Um...white, red, and...black," she answered nonetheless.

"Let's start with white: when was the last time you turned into that color?"

"In Disney Castle I suppose," she replied.

"Do you remember why?"

She gave a hesitated nod, "Well, there were Heartless everywhere. I remember running, and the Heartless started to swarm all over me. Sora tried to help me, but there were too many, and that's when I saw complete blackness. That's all I can remember. Sora never really told me what happened, but if he did, then I can't really be sure about it."

Cloud nodded, "Alright, good. Now tell me when you're in the Red State." Huh...States....guess she could call them that.

She looked at Cloud for a really long time, "That happens when I'm angry."

"Leon was not specific...but what happened at that island, I need to know," Cloud replied.

Aseles fidgeted in place, and dropped her gaze, "I really don't want to tell you...and I couldn't if I

tried.” Before Cloud could ask, “Sora didn’t tell me anything of what he saw. When you said I had Darkness before....I think you’re right.” Aseles lifted her hands, staring at them, “It’s....deep inside me. I can feel it...hiding, away from the light.”

“Just because you have it doesn’t mean you can’t control it,” Cloud suddenly replied.

Aseles shot a glance up to him, “How do I do that?”

“I’m going to help you,” Cloud finished. Maybe, just maybe, Cloud was the key to make it all work.



## Return

SORA'S POV:

"What do you think will happen to Aseles?" Donald asked with his arms crossed on his chest. He sat lumpy in his chair as he gazed at Sora who was quiet and rigid.

"I don't even know," Sora answered his hands behind his head as he stared out the window.

"You think it was a good idea to leave her?" Goofy asked. He played with his thumbs, "Maybe leaving her was a bad idea."

"No it wasn't, stop saying that," Sora answered, looking over to him. Sora couldn't help but feel guilty in some way, and didn't want to feel that way. He had made the right decision...he did.... "She was.....too dangerous to take," Sora replied, his face in his palms. He sighed heavily, as Goofy tapped his head with his finger.

"Who's going to take care of her?" Goofy asked.

"Cloud will," Sora said, leaning back on the chair. Not the person he hoped, but it was better than nothing. Cloud seemed a little too rough, but it would have to do, right?

"Cloud?" Donald asked. Sora nodded.

"Why Cloud?" Goofy asked.

"That's what Leon decided, he's in charge of her..." Sora answered as the gummi ship stayed silent on its course.

It was true that Aseles was dangerous, but was it possible for Cloud to teach her without being killed himself? And will Aseles be able to travel with them again, or will the party consist of the three of them, such as before?

For a moment, the gummi ship suddenly grew gloomy and depressed, Sora's eyes dawning on the empty chair at the far right. They were headed to Agrabah, but nothing was going to stop their plans, including the absence of Aseles.

ASELES'S POV:

"Do it again," Cloud demanded as he stood with his arms across his chest. His gaze was cold and serious, but by this time Aseles couldn't hold her own, a good majority of her energy depleted. It was no use to turn into the Red State by force, it was a toll to pay for every try she did. She didn't have the strength to get herself angry. Through all the possibilities, nothing was happening for her to succeed.

Sweat dripped from her chin and fell on the dirt floor, and she felt the world tumble as she fell on her back, her chest rising hungrily for the air around. She heard footsteps approaching, and she stumbled to get up as quick as she could. She grabbed her knees and then stood up straight, trying to get her mind into place again. Cloud reached for the handle of his sword, but placed it his hand back down, crossing his arms again.

"Now, concentrate," Cloud demanded. Aseles picked up her keyblade tightly from the ground, and held it in front of her, targeting the weapon. She felt raw, gritting her teeth as the promiscuous emotion erupted within her throat, cleansing her body with its horrible scent. Her hands trembled

and her mind shook in her skull, blasting against the walls. The keyblade in hand started to shake massively and her vision began to shift to a light maroon.

There was a loud boom in her eyes and she grunted, stumbling back. The keyblade fell out of her hands, steaming as it touched the floor. Aseles fell on her knees, her hand becoming a fist as she began to punch the floor continuously. Her hair hung in front of her face, bringing the shadows above her eyelids.

"Practice...is over." Aseles shifted in her place, and began to pick up her head, catching Cloud jumping onto the balcony above. She tried to stand, but she felt herself forever glued to the floor.

"No, wait!" she croaked, and felt the frustration begin to settle in the crevices of her muscles. She reached for her keyblade, and used it to support herself off the ground, but she fell back once more, knowing that she wasn't going anywhere with that lame endurance. She closed her eyes as she lay still, looking up at the darkening sky. The moon was high as the stars began to pop in one by one, decorating the sky. Her arms extended about her among the cold floor, and she began to wonder what Sora, Donald and Goofy were doing at the moment. Perhaps...just maybe, they were doing better without her.

The feeling of loneliness began to settle in. It was such a horrible, agonizing feeling....

*"Aseles, you alright?" Aseles tried to see past the blinding light.*

*"Just a few more minutes..."*

*"Aseles, wake up already."*

*She groaned, sitting up and felt incoherent to her surroundings, "What is it, Cloud?"*

*"First thing, I'm not Cloud." Aseles squinted her eyes, seeing a figure's silhouette in front, shrouded in black. She had to blink several times before she gathered her full, clear vision. Her eyes shot up underneath the black hood as they were slightly leaning over her, and she spotted the glimpse of curving blond hair underneath the shadows.*

*Her eyes widened as she stood up in a hurr, taking a step back until she could rub her eyes. She opened them again, hearing the member pull back their hood, and revealing it was Roxas underneath. His eyes shot out bright blue to her as she gulped gently, looking about hurriedly.*

*"Who else is here?" she asked.*

*"No one, just me," he replied.*

*"Where were you all this time? Why are you following me in here?"*

*"I'm still looking for someone," he replied again.*

*"You're looking for Sora....still?"*

*Roxas's face turned solid, "Yes, I am."*

*"Why are you looking for him?" she asked, unable to comprehend why this member was following Sora. He had never explained why he was looking for him, and she couldn't help but wonder how in the world he was able to communicate her through here. "What connection do you have with him?" Aseles persisted.*

*"I need to know...why," Roxas started, "Why I was chosen, why he was chosen."*

*"I-I don't understand."*

*"I'm his Nobody." Aseles felt her mouth drop, and she looked among the ground, then glanced up to study Roxas's face. To her astonishment, his reply was correct. Unbeknownst to her this whole time, the answer was right in front of her face, in plain sight. They looked.....so similar to one another. They were practically twins minus the hair.*

*"He....has a Nobody? How?? How does that happen?" Aseles replied sternly. "Does he even know??"*

*"No, he doesn't," Roxas shook his head.*

*"Then why are you telling me?" Aseles shot back.*

*"Because I feel like I can trust you."*

*"With something as big as this....I don't think I will hold for very long," Aseles slowly shook her head, slightly glaring at him.*

*"I need to know....why the keyblade chose him." Aseles opened her mouth to say something, but the words stood stuck in her throat. The pull of gravity was strong as she felt herself being hauled upward, ready to hit the ceiling-*

Aseles shot herself up from the ground and looked around, feeling the adrenaline kick in; somebody was watching her.

Aseles slowly patted off the dirt from her back, feeling the sun rise up from the mountains from the east. She had slept outside the whole entire night, but the deadly silent field alarmed her further. She heard the sound of padding footsteps, and she swiftly turned with keyblade in hand to dart her eyes across the landscape. Upon turning again, a person in a black cloak stood in view and she regained her defensive stance, her mind locked onto the target.

"What do you want?" she spat out. The person did not say anything. He just merely took a step forward as she gave another leap back. Her hair rested along her face, feeling the back of her neck sweat lively.

Aseles took a deep step back, but before she could charge, the member raised his other hand toward her, telling her to stop. Aseles froze, watching as the member placed his hand back down by his side.

"I'm going to ask you again, what do you want?!" Aseles regained ground.

"I did not come here to fight you," he suddenly replied.

"Then what are you here for?" Aseles shouted out.

"Have you decided upon your path, Aseles?"

She froze, gritting her teeth as she shook her head, "I need more time..."

"How dense can you be?" the member suddenly replied, making Aseles shift in place. "Your friends abandoned you...and yet, you still side with them. What compels you to do such foolish acts?"

Aseles opened her mouth to say something, but then she felt the brush of her hair, and she shot around, her eyes wide to see the man was now hovering his tall stature above her, his back bent

for him to be level with her. She stared within the shadow of his hoods, seeing bright, gold irises take possession of her.

“What draws you to be by their side, Aseles?” he asked, leaning forward.

“G-Get away-“ Aseles swung her arm, but her wrist was caught, the keyblade clanking to the floor as he twisted her arm. Aseles grunted, motioning herself forward to ease the twist, but now found herself staring right directly up into the hood of the person, the hood almost hiding both of their faces away. She felt his cool breath against her face, his eyes glittering as his blue hair began to rain down his hood, the light tips circling around Aseles’s face. She struggled in place, but he kept her firm with one more inch of twist. She stopped, only able to stare at him.

It was clear, that Aseles was outmatched by him. No matter what she did, she would be at his mercy. She stayed incredibly still, feeling his breath circle around her face with his pearls of teeth gleaming from the rays trying to protrude into his hood.

“You like the boy....” he suddenly replied.

“I do not-“

“You are lying,” the man replied. Aseles gritted her teeth. “Do you not remember the chest?”

“What chest-“ Aseles’s mouth dropped open, and the man’s eyes glittered again. “You.....you LEFT THAT!”

“To spare you of horrible feelings. As you can see, Sora already has someone else. Does that not enrage you? Does it not pick at your soft heart?”

“Let-go of me!”

“Indeed it does. I see it in your eyes, the turmoil you are suffering. You are in love with this wielder, but nothing you will do will cease his true feelings.”

“Why should I believe anything you tell me?!”

“You are in denial. Such a sad, cruel thing to lie upon yourself,” he replied. “You will feel nothing but betrayal from him, but if that is how you want to persist, so be it.” He quickly let go of her as Aseles retracted back her wrist, taking a couple of steps back as she glared at the man.

“We have tried to make you see the error of your ways, but nothing will suffice to make you change your mind. You are living nothing but a fantasy with them,” the man replied, holding a hand back behind him. He began to enter the portal, staring at her as Aseles watching him disappear, the portal flowing up and melting in a dark wisp of air.

Aseles blinked rapidly, feeling her chest heaving as she rubbed her wrist. That man....that Organization member was far beyond what she was anticipating. He said things...Aseles couldn’t have possibly be thinking.

Aseles quickly shook the thought out, regaining her composure, rigid once more. Looking up, she felt a company close by. In a matter of ten seconds, she saw Cloud appearing, his arms crossed on his chest. She swallowed, unsure if he had just seen the event occur or not.

“You’ve been here all night?” Cloud questioned.

“Er....yeah,” Aseles replied hesitantly.

"Come on....let's eat. I don't want Leon thinking I'm starving you."

"Okay...." Aseles nodded slowly, picking up her keyblade, and stared at it for a moment. She looked back up to Cloud who was waiting, and she pushed the thought out.

"Just don't eat too much."

FFW:

The few days proved difficulty for the Red State, but Aseles had managed to be somewhat level of its ultimate possession. Though, Aseles could only feel the worst approaching, but didn't understand what her role for Organization XIII was. Why would they need her, out of all people that could fight better or defend more effectively....what could Aseles provide for them and no one else could? Aseles could feel them, watching her from afar, knowing full where of where she was residing, and she also knew that they knew that, Sora, Donald and Goofy were not with her.

This evening, Aseles was following Cloud through the houses, growing curious as to why the place seemed so empty. It never crossed her mind to ask about the place, and the more time she spent here, the more this odd feeling of wanting to be here began to crease her mind.

"Hey, Cloud, why does this world seem.....abandoned?" she asked. After all these sessions, looking at him in the eye was becoming more uncomfortable to bear.

"Follow me." Aseles nodded and followed behind him, noticing that they were heading to Merlin's Study. Cloud approached the door and opened it for Aseles, but he peered in hesitantly, quirked her mouth to one side. It was still slightly uncomfortable being with everyone else in the same room.

"There's no one here," Cloud reassured. Aseles took a few steps and found herself inside the study. She heard Cloud close the door behind him as she saw Cloud signal her to take a seat. She took Cid's chair, rolling it into her possession and sat down, looking up to see Cloud leaning against the doorframe. .

The silence was broken by Cloud's comforting, profound words, "In the past, this place was ruled by Ansem, the one thought to be to destroy the Heartless. But turns out he was a fake," Cloud stopped, then continued, "Sora, Goofy, and Donald found out he was the one helping the Heartless take over the worlds with darkness..." Following among his sentences, they somehow drifted to him being in Olympus once, and how he had sided with Hades that upon defeating Hercules. Cloud continued of how he had met Leon, Yuffie, Cid, and Aerith upon his arrival to Hollow Bastion, even if it was a brief explanation. So Cloud wasn't even from around here.

"Will it ever end?" Aseles asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Will the darkness ever end?"

"There is darkness within every heart," was his simple reply. Such depressing thoughts....

"How long we will be training today? We're almost done, right?"

"I'll try to push you over your limit today; I'm giving you a warning," Cloud replied.

Aseles blinked, but she hurriedly stood up as Cloud began to open the door, and began to head outside as Aseles exited the Study and closed the door behind her with a thud. She waited for him to take the lead, but instead found herself walking side by side with him.

"Hey Cloud, doesn't anyone live here?"

Cloud shook his head, "No." Aseles sighed to herself, dropping the subject as the two continued on, Aseles wondering how.... Cloud was going to pursue his plan. It was Cloud.....EH...the ideas didn't settle well. As helpful as he was....the man had a strong grip to his training.

Both approached the Bailey, but to her sudden shock, she felt the back of her shirt hauled around and her feet meeting air, her body completely hanging out of the balcony's edge. Aseles shot around, but was unprepared as she fell to the ground in a harsh thud and painful yelp. She spit out the dirt from her mouth, quickly running forward to see Cloud had launched a surprise attack on her, his sword meeting the crater on the floor instead.

Aseles staggered on her feet, "What was that for?! A warning would've been-" Cloud dashed in extreme speed as Aseles leapt back, countering his swinging block. The force proved powerful that she found herself sliding back and staggering to regain her balance. Cloud approached once more, his eyes ice cold.

She backed away, "C-Cloud?" He didn't answer, and instead she took the offensive and pointed her keyblade forward to him, trembling in place, officially knowing that this guy was out of his wicked mind. He was suddenly in front in a quick dash as he picked up his sword. She blocked, but was unprepared for the evasive move of his arm, her face meeting the handle of his blade.

Her mouth rocketed heavily as she cried out, holding it as the blood began to mash within her teeth as her body skidding across the ground. She rolled to a stop as she growled, her eyes shooting to red as the ends of her hair struck upward on top of her head. Aseles charged, striking powerfully as her keyblade met the body of his blade, her weapon pushing heavily forward, groaning as his feet began to slide among the ground. She yelled as she swung deadly in front, throwing Cloud off of his feet and watching him regain balance in the air. He landed perfectly but it wasn't long before he was floating among the ground, a few feet. Her eyes widened and locked, finding his body surging with lightning, golden bolts. The tip of his blade pulsed from the deadly spell as his cloak sprung to life behind him. His hair blew in the rushing winds as he glided forward in rough speed, the tip of his blade cutting across the ground so easily, he made it seem like seams of paper.

She placed her keyblade in the way in time as Cloud took her, air rushing through her back. He kept on going and pushing, making it impossible to escape the force that held her prisoner. To her dismay, the corner of her eyes caught the glimpse of a rock wall approaching. She struggled greatly to push Cloud off, but found that Cloud's might was stronger than her strength. Her back hit the wall with a silent bang, causing a massive explosion of agony among her blood vessels. Her mouth flew open as she found herself facing the ground, looking past the fallen rocks around to see Cloud was walking away, his blade held firmly in his hand.

She couldn't move, feeling the gush of blood in her mouth swirling. Aseles grunted as she pushed herself forward, falling to the ground front first. It hurt continuously to move as she felt the falling pebbles on her back. No, surely this training wasn't over....but it felt. She felt so defeated....

Aseles felt her bones move and blood rush through in her body again, and she began to stagger on her feet with her keyblade struck against the ground as she heaved herself up. The orbs of blood within her mouth were swallowed roughly as her fingers twitched upon the keyblade's handle. She picked up her head to look at Cloud's continuing leave, and saw the flicker of a black cloak in front of her. Why did...this feeling....feel so familiar? It hurt....so much and yet....she was just watching him leave, watching him leave her behind.

"Practice...is over," he replied calmly.

Pure rage sparked within her mangled body, feeling her teeth dig against each other, "No! It's not over!" Aseles yelled, gripping her keyblade with force that it whitened her knuckles. The pain increased with every step she took, but the need to win shrouded it with every kicking sprint she took. Her hair rose to its tips as her keyblade sparked to a darker color. Her vision darkened to only see Cloud the brightest object around, and knew this was her chance to prove him wrong.

She pushed, pulled, kicked, and punched with every ounce of power flooding through her, unaware of the shouting voices overhead. The sound was deaf in her ears as her eyes stayed locked on target, the bright body jumping and kicking around in view. What was going on? How much time was passing?

"Stop, you're going to kill him!!!"

In a flash, Aseles averted her eyes up, and the whole world was dropped to its normal color. She stumbled back as she faced the sky, gasping for breath as the taste of iron and rock swirled among her tongue. She turned to the side, sitting to see Aerith was approaching in a fast run with Yuffie and Leon. Her hair dropped to its original color around her shoulders, narrowing her eyes. She felt the presence, and turned to face forward, her mouth dropping as her hands clamped forward to clasp around it. Cloud was lying on his back, his body twisted as he lay completely still on the ground. His eyes were dark and closed with every inch of skin exposed demolished in cuts and bruises. Her eyes shot to the keyblade at his feet, her lungs gasping at the horror of massive red liquid crawling all over it.

Aseles's stomach boiled with revulsion, unbelieving that the end result had come to this. Sora was right...she was a danger to everyone. It all happened in a blur....She could not recall anything.

Aseles hurried over to him, but felt a pair of arms grip her from behind. She protested, and managed to fall on Cloud's side. On his other side was Aerith, gasping horribly with her hands trembling in front of her mouth. Aseles leaned forward, hearing Cloud's short breaths drop leisurely. Surely his end would come.

"Aseles, st--"

Aseles clamped her keyblade in her palm, and she pointed it to the others as Aerith backed away immediately from her threat, "Stay back!" Their faces went blank as Aseles felt her face sink into anguish, her eyes trembling as they stared at Cloud's mangled body. It was her fault....It was her fault.

Aseles rested the body of her keyblade on top of Cloud's, feeling something surging at her fingertips, and felt the power beginning to sink within Cloud's chest. Aseles began to feel lightheaded, but she persisted on delivering her strength to Cloud, feeling herself slowly fading, and feeling nothing but the beating of her own heart. After a short brief moment, the golden light had disappeared and reality kicked in the gut.

Aseles could feel her heart pounding leisurely while Cloud's pounded furiously beneath her hands. Her eyes shifted up and down, trying to stay awake as Cloud shot up to sit, Leon hurrying over as she caught Aseles before she fell to the ground. She felt numb, and couldn't feel Leon's hand patting her cheek. This warm touch of death brewed among her eyes, and she looked up to see Leon's face beginning to blur.

"Everything is going to be alright! Stay with me!" Yeah...everything will be alright....in a few moments....

Aseles gurgled once, dropping her eyes to close, and felt nothing.

*Nothing was visible in this pitch abyss of darkness.*

*It soon subsided to a neatly lit room of white, the place Aseles dreaded so dearly...*

*Cautious, she held her hand out, but the keyblade did not come to command.*

*"How...." Aseles looked around her, feeling the ground shift and crack. It suddenly turned a gross black, and she found her feet sinking, phasing through like sinking sand as she could not move. Below a sharp sting of light arose as her eyes rolled downward, seeing a cerulean platform, decorated in glass with a huge white rose in the middle. It gleamed vastly in her approach as a cloud of glitter arose when she landed on it, her body lying on it, helpless as she could feel none of her muscles contracting for her to sit up.*

*"What are you most afraid of?"*

*Aseles finally felt herself sitting up, unsure where the voice was coming from. She looked around the platform she laid on, and found it had grown smaller in size, and now was just enough to hold her laying legs, the ankles hooking over the edge of the platform.*

*"Tell me, what are you most afraid of?"*

*"Who are you...?" Aseles asked groggily, feeling her mind roll from side to side.*

*"Do you accept Darkness?"*

*Aseles stayed silent, but then, "...I have Darkness...inside me. But...it's not mine."*

*"You say it is not yours....but it has grown within you. Are you prepared to face the consequences?"*

*"Am I....dead?" Aseles asked. She felt so light here....*

*"Summon the keyblade, wielder."*

*Given so little options and so little information...Aseles was not sure what to do, but she held out her hand, and called for her keyblade...though it did not approach. She blinked once, then let her hand fall in her lap.*

*"Look deep enough to bring it out. The memory is not lost, it has only been misplaced."*

*Aseles suddenly felt the rushing winds along her face, as they grew ferocious as Aseles began to feel her limp body tip back, and the back of her body beginning to hang over the platform. Her hands reacted, and she gripped onto the edge of the platform, feeling her legs kick wildly behind her as the winds continued to plummet against her face. Her body wavered like a flag as she grunted, slamming her upper body against the ground firmly.*

*"Let go....."*

*"No....I can't let go," Aseles shook her head mildly. She could finally feel the struggling expression on her face, and the prying fingers from the platform. Aseles curled up, and began to feel the adrenaline of power within her body. She hung on tightly onto the platform, and found herself crawling forward onto it, her feet pressing against the platform. She steadily began to stand, and she looked up at the dark abyss before her.*

*"I will not let go," she replied firmly, her voice echoing among the place. There was a shift and the platform began to crack beneath her feet. Her eyes widened as she looked around, but found*



*no place she could jump to safety to. Was this...the end?*

*The winds blew again as Aseles felt the air taking refuge within her shirt and pants, her hair blowing upwards as the crack multiplied, bright veins of lights blinding her.*

*“Someone, help me,” she whispered. In her hand, something hefty appeared, but she couldn’t make out what it was as she had begun to free fall downward, spiraling out of control, and the bright light blinding her completely. She had reached the end.*

Aseles gasped heavily, taking in the cold air as her lungs burst to flames. Her fingers retracted forward to grip the ground, finding her right hand hold soft fabric as she tugged. Her eyes flickered as she looked about, immediately met with rushing shadows in her wake, but only to see their silhouettes.

“Aseles!” Leon’s voice boomed as she felt the strong squeeze of arms around her shoulders. She blinked rapidly against the sun’s rays, seeing freckles of red and orange, and finally, able to make out Leon’s face. Yuffie was second to push her face into view, her arms throwing themselves forward, catching Aseles in a crunching embrace.

“You’re alright!!! You’re alright!” she cried out. Aseles gasped, unable to reply as her arms flailed behind her.

“Yuffie, you’re killing her!” Cid quickly shouted from the side.

“Oh, sorry!” Yuffie was quick to let go, but resumed a tackle, throwing Aseles onto the dirt floor. Aseles coughed as she looked up, seeing Merlin and Cid leaning over Yuffie’s body, with Leon and Aerith standing beside them. “Aseles!! You’re alright!”

“Ow.....” Aseles replied meekly, grunting. “What.....happened.....?” Yuffie let go as she helped Aseles sit up, patting the dirt off of her back. Aseles rubbed her forehead, groaning as she winced, “...Jeez....that really hurt...”

“You were unconscious for a while....” Leon replied.

“It’s quite a miracle you’re back lady.....” Merlin replied slowly. “Glad I came here just in time to mend those wounds of yours when Yuffie went to go call me.”

“Don’t ever do that again,” Yuffie pointed a finger straight at Aseles, “Whatever it was....it wasn’t funny.”

Aseles stared at her nervously, “Yeah....sorry about that....but....” Aseles began to slowly stand with Yuffie’s help, and she looked around the field. Who was that voice?

LATER:

"That was close," Leon shook his head, "There was no pulse in you." He let go of your bandaged arm as Aseles blinked in surprise, but cleared her throat. She looked toward the bed to see Cloud was all bandaged up as well, Aerith sitting by his side as she exchanged his wet towels again. Aseles scowled, dropping her gaze as she faced the wall.

“Aseles....” Aseles froze, shooting her glance toward where Cloud lay. His eye cracked open to look at her, “Come here.” Aseles shifted in place, but she timidly stood as she began to walk over, and stood beside the bed.

“I’m sorry....Cloud....”

"Don't let that Darkness override you. That is the only way you can prevent something like this....from happening again," Cloud replied.

Aseles looked to him, but nodded slowly, "I understand."

"He'll be fine. Thank you for saving him," Aerith replied, looking up to Aseles. Aseles dropped her gaze again, and began to walk over to sit in front of Leon again.

"I've come to the decision to let you continue to let you on the journey," Leon replied.

Aseles shot her eyes up to him, "What....WHY? You saw what....I did to Cloud..."

"Yes...but it won't get better unless it shows up more," Leon replied. He reached forward, gripping onto Aseles's shoulder, making her look up at him, "I am trusting you.....extremely, to continue on the journey. Do you understand?"

"...Yes...I understand," Aseles nodded.

"Cloud as no more training to offer for you. You're on your own from here," Leon replied as he stood. Aseles followed, and the two began to walk over to Merlin who was standing by the door. "I guess it's time for you to go, and catch up with the others," Leon said

"Now?" Aseles looked at him bewildered.

"Of course, you must help the other fellows at work," Merlin said, "and it will be my pleasure to escort you there." Aseles looked to him, unsure how in the world he could even do that without a gummi ship. Well...he was a wizard...

"Uh...I guess," she replied uncertainly. Merlin gave a small smile as he pulled out his wand from within his robes. He gave a swing around as Aseles looked about the flying, glittering colors hovering among her head and body.

"And away we go!" Merlin flicked his wrist, and the sensation of being spun in one spot took control. Aseles's eyes spun as she gripped her head tightly, shaking it as the floor was now solid beneath her feet. She blinked, finding the air completely humid and thick, and she looked around to see the yellow sand of the ragged desert.

Aseles turned around to the side, "Hey Merlin, is this the right p-" Her eyes stopped to look about her, finding that you was alone. Merlin had completely vanished from site. "Yeah! Thanks!" she shouted, rolling her eyes to spot some sort of building....and really it was the only thing nearby from miles around.

She began to head toward it with a groan, the sun instantly beating down against her back, "He could've at least poofed me at the doors...."

LATER:

Aseles finally arrived to the front gates, panting of the heat that literally scorched her alive.

The place was bigger than she had expected, though sadly it was far more distant than she had anticipated. She went toward the front gates and pushed, but no use. She grunted and scoffed, grunting as she pushed harder, but found the wood would not budge from her sliding heels on the baking sand. Before she could make another rough push forward, she scrabbled backwards, falling back onto her rear to feel the hot sand on her fingertips.

She waved her hands quickly from side to side as she bolted up from the cooking ground, looking

up to see Donald, Goofy, and Sora had been the one pushing from the other side. Immediately their eyes fell onto Aseles as she coughed nervously.

"Aseles!" the three yelled in surprise.

"Heeey....guys.....um...how's it going?" Aseles replied nervously, pushing her hands behind her back and hunching her back slightly forward.

"What happened with the Hollow Bastion Committee?" Sora asked, immediately taking steps forward. Aseles quickly took several paces back, clearing her throat as Sora stopped advancing to her direction. "How are you feeling?" Sora said.

"I'm....feeling fine," Aseles nodded quickly, her eyes briefly meeting Sora's, but they quickly looked away, remembering that he was the one that had left her behind. Sora seemed to notice, and he slightly nodded, taking a step back.

"Well it's good to have ya back, Aseles!" Goofy marched forward, and he embraced her in a tight hug. Aseles blinked, but she patted his back as well, feeling him let go as Donald merely waved in her direction.

Approaching behind them was a young man, fleshed out in almond skin with a small monkey on his broad shoulder. He wore a worn-out, lavender vest with his chest bare, a brown waistband above his white, rounded dress pants. His bare feet walked easily onto the sand as Aseles watched in amazement, but figured he was used to the hot temperature here.

His brown eyes gleamed at Aseles's appearance, his black hair swopping from side to side as he approached closer. The monkey on his shoulder stood straighter, his skinny tail curling around the man's ear. Even the little monkey wore an attire close to the man's, except for the pants.

Sora noticed as he took a step back, clearing his throat, "Aseles, this is Aladdin and Abu."

"Nice to meet you," Aladdin smiled as he held out a hand to her. Aseles smiled back just the same, gripping his hand and giving a slight shake.

"Nice to meet you," Aseles replied.

"Abu!" Aladdin shook his shoulder, noticing at the monkey had taken refuge to hide behind his hair.

"Nah, it's alright," Aseles reassured.

"How did you get here?" Goofy asked.

Aseles looked at him, "Uh....Merlin left me...in the middle of the desert..." Donald snickered from the side, but quickly stopped as Sora smacked him upside the head. Aseles cleared her throat, "So where were you guys headed?"

"To the Cave of Wonders," Aladdin answered. Aseles raised an eyebrow as Aladdin chuckled, "You'll see." And by the logic of it, Sora, Donald and Goofy already seemed to be know what that place was. Aladdin was first to lead as Aseles waited for the others to follow, and then she took her pace at the rear. They were going to be traveling in the sand....great.

"We go that way, right?" Sora asked, pointing forward. Aseles's eyes gazed among the odd scenery in the distance, seeing the thunderclouds of dark gray looming over, and it seemed to be in a specific area. There also seemed to be a large mix of dry, blazing clouds blocking the way. Aseles was already dreading the walk over there, and by the looks of it, that storm didn't seem too

friendly.

"Genie!" Aladdin said as the others nodded in agreement, though she had no idea who in the world that was.

Aladdin called out the name once more, though Aseles was sure this man had gone bonkers from the heat waves. Though, a few seconds later, a loud explosion sounded off above as Aseles shrieked silently in her clamping hands, looking to see a blue figure form from a bundle of rising smoke in midair. To her complete astonishment, there was a genie in full view, all blue with a red waistband among his lower abdomen. Literally, it was as if this guy came out of a fairytale book. Her mouth shot open in awe as the genie named...well Genie, approached Aladdin with a quick swoop, his eyes also looking toward Abu, Sora, Donald and Goofy cheerfully.

"Hey Al! How you've been? And Sora, Donald, and Goofy! Nice to see you old chaps!" Genie's eyes then fell on Aseles, and he placed his hand on his chin, "Well, well, what have we got here?"

Aseles cowered her head further, feeling pink in the cheeks, "Umm..."

"Allow me to introduce myself, I'm...Genie! I could grant your every wish!" All around Aseles, burst of fireworks started to burst, making her jump in fright mainly, though he increased the bursts of explosions, shooting himself upwards to become a large spark of frizzing blue rain. The next second Aseles found herself lying on a big red sofa with the Genie sitting on a small brown stool, wearing glasses and a notebook with a pencil in his hand.

"Now tell me, what are your problems and what wishes would you want to make?" Aseles tilted her head at him, giving him a perplexed face, and hearing the others somewhere laughing their heads off.

"Whoa whoa whoa! Wait just a sec!" Aseles waved her hands defensively in front of her. This was definitely bizarre, but this Genie had a lot of full energy, which slightly....scared her. "You already want to grant me a wish? We haven't even met!"

"Oh course my friend! A friend of these lovable guys is a friend of mine!" Genie explained with a large grin. The next second the sofa was gone as she wobbled to her feet.

She looked up to the hovering Genie, blinking, "Well uh...I can't...think of one really."

"Well whenever you do have one, don't be hesitant to ask me," Genie grinned, ruffling her hair. Aseles felt the enormous fro on her head, and quickly batted it down, making it return to her usual locks.

"Hey, Genie, mind doing us a huge favor?" Aladdin asked. "We need you to get rid of the sandstorm over there."

"I imagine it's a big storm if you called me!" But as Genie turned around to face the sandstorm in the distance, a frown went across his face, "This is it?!" All of them nodded. He groaned as he snapped his fingers, making the huge sandstorm disappear in two seconds. The group stood in amazement as Genie crossed his arms and turned into blue smoke instantly, "Call me when it's something big at least."

Genie had disappeared.

MOMENTS LATER:

"A magic carpet, you've got to be kidding me?!" The carpet was lavished with purple, gold and red streamed in soft linen among its sides and surface sign in elegant curves. It slithered its way

across the air like an elegant snake in water, and stood on two of its fabric handles at the ends, using them much like feet and using the top two like hands. Aseles couldn't help but quickly shake one, already feeling acquainted with these new friends.

Everyone sat on board, scooting close to each other as Carpet rose slowly to the air, Aseles's body almost losing balance. She grabbed on tightly and gasped as the rug went rapidly forward, making her let go of the rug and bump into Sora behind her. He gripped Aseles tightly as she looked at him, and she couldn't help but feel her smile fade away. His smile dropped as well, and he slowly let her go, keeping his attention ahead instead. Aseles on the other hand looked over at the edge, looking to see that the sand itself was moving along freely beneath.

Her hair blew around her face, looking to see that Carpet was making a fast approach toward the dark place in the desert in quick speed. It had grown bigger in size as the gloomy air surrounded the group, quickly dimming out the bright rays of the sun and cooling the air entirely. It felt soothing to the touch, entering Aseles's nostrils as they felt relief.

Arriving at the entrance to the cave, the chills were now up and running her hot, pulsing neck. The cave was nonetheless intimidating, shaped like a vicious tiger's head with its jaws snarling open in a still position, almost frozen in time to attack. Its yellow orbs for eyes were very illuminating and narrowed; she somehow felt...this thing was alive. Everyone seemed collected as they walked toward it as Aseles slid off the Carpet hesitantly.

"Aseles, come on," Donald signaled, already seeming impatient. Aseles gulped with a nervous nod, but only seemed to walk when Sora and Goofy began to push her forward, with her heels sliding against the damp sand. Coming upon the mouth of the cave proved difficulty, noticing that the head was moving slightly indeed. Oh, she could only hope this thing didn't really have any stomach acid waiting below the red steps within. The darkness was uncomfortable, but when Aseles had finally reached the light below after some guiding shoulders, her face dropped in awe of the wondrous, golden glowing area. There was literally gold...everywhere.

"Before we move on, it's important to not touch anything," Aladdin said. Donald scoffed immediately as he crossed his arms, Aseles's jaw dropping in disappointment. Not even a souvenir? Aladdin's face automatically said no.

The group continued forward as Aladdin with Abu led with Sora, Goofy, Donald, Aseles following, and Carpet last as it tussled with Aseles's made ponytail behind her head. She looked around seeing mountains of cups, coins, necklaces, bracelets, things she could simply could just put in her pocket to take inviting to her eyes. Even the walls and ceilings were made of the fascinating color. The deeper she headed inside; she found the group reaching an area where the piles of gold were flowing out of the walls in rivers. Obviously this cave WAS tempting her. So evil and cruel.

At the end of the rugged room, a candle-holder of three feet stood, beautifully decorated in gems and jewels, made fitfully right for some sort of emperor or king. At the main, red gem in the very center, all of them reflected off of it when they finally stood in front of it.

"Is this what we need?" Aseles asked, pushing her hands into her pockets. Better safe than sorry with her grabby fingers.

"To give it to that peddler that is," Aladdin said, walking up the steps to it, "Maybe he'll finally give up that lamp that has Jafar inside."

"We'll explain on the way," Goofy turned to Aseles as she nodded back to him. Aladdin then reached for the treasure and grabbed it slowly, pulling it out of its stand quickly. Everyone waited and then sighed of relief.

"Hey, where's Abu?" Goofy asked. Everyone's eyes widened and looked everywhere.

"Abu, NO!" Aladdin yelled out, seeing the little monkey reaching for a gem at the top of wall at the far left. But before anyone could do anything, Abu reached for it, causing ultimately their demise. CRAP.

The whole cave began to shake uncontrollably, a loud roar filling her eardrums as the piles of gold rained down among her feet as she stumbled to gain her balance. Abu immediately took action of his mistake and with a frightened look put the gem back, running back down. Everyone ran toward Carpet as it floated in the air, everyone gripping for dear life as it flew off the floor. To make Aseles's insides shriek even that much more, lava presented itself from the cracks of the brick floor, pouring upward as the heat instantly intensified. Carpet rushed past the mountains of falling gold and the dropping rocks from the unstable ceiling above. Aseles gave a shriek as she held Abu in her arms.

"Hold on!" Aladdin yelled out as Carpet started to descend downward, Aseles finding her body shaking terribly from this new experience of fear. She pushed herself forward as Carpet then made sharp turns, already making her fearful of falling off. Carpet then started to go up; leading to the mouth of the cave as the stairs began to give way and the dark light from outside began to diminish. Aseles fell back, Abu still in her hands as Sora gripped her shoulder, holding Aseles down. Aseles shut her eyes tightly as the mouth of the cave roared once more, making her ears drum in dimness. The whole group yelled in horror and shock as the mouth finally closed, with all of them outside of it.

After a few moments, everyone looked down to see the head begin to shrink down into the sand, shielding itself within the grounds. Carpet lowered itself as Sora and Aladdin laughed nervously with Donald and Goofy.

"That was fun," Aladdin cleared his throat. Sora then pointed to Abu, signaling Aseles to let go.

"Oh!" she released, looking down to see all of Abu's hair up and his face turning blue from choking. "Whoops...Sorry."

**BACK IN AGRABAH:**

"So, it's important for Jafar not to get out of the lamp. Really, that's all I got," Aseles replied as Aladdin nodded up from ahead. The warm intensity of the air reappeared as Carpet began to lead the way towards Agrabah again. Aseles pondered on the story, rubbing her chin and nodded to herself in thought.

After a few minutes, they all hopped off Carpet at the Bazaar of the city, very much alive with shoppers and buyers of every kind. Aladdin carried the treasure toward the Peddler's Shop, far from the other merchants and instead was inside a stone building to the side. Upon entering, the shop was open, but the peddler was nowhere in sight as Aseles followed behind the others.

"Where'd he go?" Aladdin questioned cautiously. Aseles swiftly twirled around, hearing some sort of commotion from outside, and it sounded like....

Aladdin put down the treasure and ran out to the exit as Aseles was the second to follow. She looked to the left, seeing a small man with a huge white turban on his head running with a black lamp in his hands, with Pete missing every opportunity to grip it, both of them dashing by.

"You better give it to me or that'll be the last thing you do!" They disappeared to a corner as Sora, Donald and Goofy quickly followed with Aladdin, Abu and Aseles in the rear. Quickly Pete had cornered the short man, and swiped the lamp out of the man's hands, making his way toward the

other entrance of the Bazaar with the peddler on the ground in defeat.

"Hey, Pete!" Sora swung his arm as his keyblade spun out in action. Pete turned, regretting it entirely as he fell back with a loud thump, groaning as he gripped his head. The lamp that was once in his hands was now flying across, spinning in somersaults. Aseles quickly rushed forward, quickly catching it in her hands as she dived, coughing from the clouding dirt among her face.

"He's getting away!" Goofy pointed to Pete as the group began to chase after him. At the end of the chase, Pete was trapped in front of some large palace doors with an abundance of a garden around. Sora, Donald and Goofy pulled their weapons out, cornering him as Aseles handed Aladdin the lamp, quickly taking out her own weapon. Aladdin tied the lamp around his waist, and revealed a large machete sword, position himself to face Pete.

"I-I can explain!" Pete yelled out, holding out his hands defensively in front of him.

"No way!" Donald said.

"Just give it up!" Sora yelled out.

"Fine!" Pete yelled out. He then snapped his fingers, causing two, huge Heartless to appear. They dressed like a king and queen, one red, and the other blue and, surprise, carried the elements of ice and fire to their corresponding colors. Pete suddenly passed as Aseles was quick to follow. She felt a barrier take place behind her as the others were left to deal with the Heartless. Soon, Aseles cornered Pete in a dead end walkway. He turned around to face her as she held keyblade in hand.

"Why do you always have to cause trouble whenever we see you?" she yelled out, pointing her keyblade right at him.

"Hey, I'm just doing what Maleficent told me to do, alright pipsqueak!" Pete yelled out. Before Aseles could charge, there was a shift in the air, and she suddenly found herself gripped by the throat, her feet hauled off the ground. Her eyes widened to see it was yet, another Organization XIII member. Pete stared in confusion, but began to make his getaway as Aseles squirmed violently.

"Come back!" she shouted, but she gurgled when the grip around her throat tightened, and she turned her attention to the member holding her throat.

"Let-go..." Aseles gasped out, feeling her muscles in her neck tighten.

"You're running out of time, and I am running out of patience," the male replied. Aseles winced, shutting her eyes as she gasped, her lungs struggling to breathe.

Suddenly, Aseles felt herself being thrown to the ground, and she looked up to see a flash of red pass by, throwing the member across the air and crashing into the wall. Aseles staggered back on the ground, seeing the Organization XIII member beginning to wisp away in a dark flash. Aseles shot her eyes around, and faced the new enemy, adorned in red robes with his face bandaged up. He seemed to have a dark tone of skin, but she couldn't tell. His golden eye look to Aseles as Aseles began to slowly stand up, breathing deeply as the man opened his mouth to say something...but nothing came out.

"Hey, wait!" Aseles held her hand out, but the man was running into an alleyway. Aseles immediately stood up as she took chase, but when she had entered the dead-end alleyway....he was gone.

Aseles breathed heavily as she walked in, looking around the walls, and the open ceiling, "Where are you?" She called out, but there was no response. "...Thanks..." Aseles blinked and took one

last look around, but began to make her way back toward the others with no other choice, seeing that Pete had gotten away.

Upon arriving, Aseles saw the doors had been opened once more, and the barrier that was put up was gone. It seemed the other had taken care of the Heartless, with few rivers of ice among the walls and burn out spots of grass across the garden. Aseles approached in steady strides, exhaling.

"Hide the lamp somewhere safe this time. We have to get going," Sora said, looking at Aladdin.

"Sure thing. Thanks for coming with me to the Cave of Wonders, and, boy, are we glad to see you guys again," Aladdin answered with a smile, Abu immediately aiding in his comment with chatters of glee. Sora smirked as he then turned to look at Donald and Goofy, then caught Aseles's glance.

"What happened with Pete?" he asked.

"Oh...he got away..." Aseles replied, rubbing her cheek.

"Well it's alright; we'll get him next time!" Goofy reassured as she gave her shoulder a light squeeze. Aseles looked up at him and nodded slowly.

After a few moments, Sora was heading out with the rest of you following behind, waving to Aladdin and Abu with the black, ancient lamp in his safe hands. Soon the group was out of the city boundaries, the gummi ship waiting patiently in front of the doors, already anticipating your approach.

Aseles, however, stopped as she turned back, feeling someone watching as she looked around the walls, and around the desert area where the gummi ship waited. She opened her mouth, but she stopped dead to feel someone behind her. She turned, seeing it was Sora.

"Aseles?" Sora cleared his throat.

Aseles turned to look at him fully, ".....Um...I'm sorry for.....getting all crazy for the past visits."

"No....I'm sorry I couldn't....tell you face-to-face," Sora replied, rubbing his arm. "I was just worried that....you would attack one of us. I just don't want to endanger anyone."

"Yeah...I understand," Aseles nodded.

"Did your training go well?"

Aseles bit her tongue, but nodded slowly, "Yeah.....it was good."

"Then let's not waste time, we gotta get going," Sora replied, indicating Aseles to head inside. Aseles nodded as she was soon strapping herself into her seat, and the gummi ship took aim to cut the atmosphere of the world.

Aseles slumped in her hair, unsure how things were going to play out...and couldn't help but wonder who the man in the red robes was from earlier.



## Venturing Forth

The hazy world began to sharpen as Aseles's eyes flickered from her deep slumber. She slumped fully in her chair as she yawned, feeling refreshed that she had not dreamed of anything today. She stretched her arms next then stood, groaning from the tight constriction on her hamstrings. Looking around the beeping cockpit, she noticed that Sora, Donald and Goofy were all sound asleep. They must've been very exhausted.

Aseles walked forward, crossing her arms as she looked out the window, and felt the great heave of a frown on her face. This feeling...of being pulled in so many direction was aggravating, it somewhat made Aseles question whether being around them was such a good idea anymore. Whatever Organization XIII was planning....Aseles wasn't sure how she was going to deal with them.

Their persistence was beyond comprehension, and what bothered Aseles the most is what she couldn't decide for herself; again and again, she was given options, but she still sided with the people who didn't even trust her. She did not know why....but something with them...something with this group was tying her down, and she could not guess on what it was. The feeling of being with them....it felt so reassuring to her, and yet, she could not even describe what they were to her. They were friends but....could they be a family that she had previously lost? Or could Organization XIII really be family to her?

"What'cha doing?" Aseles jumped at Sora's voice as she hurriedly turned, clearing her throat to find him stretching, as he stood, his hands rubbing the back of his head.

"Um...nothing really," Aseles pushed her hands in her pocket, shrugging as she avoided his face, turning her back to him.

"What happened in Hollow Bastion?" Sora suddenly asked. Aseles blinked, gathering her thoughts as best as she could.

"Um-nothing. Cloud was just helping me; that's all..." Almost killing him in the process...but.....

"What really happened?" Aseles slightly shifted her view around, seeing Sora with arms crossed with a stern expression on his face, making Aseles almost cringe. Obviously he sensed something was amiss.

"...Uh..." To narrow it down, if she told him, she doubted he would let her progress further in the journey. But....she had to. She needed to know....what Organization XIII wanted from her. "Well, I have it all down now, but-"

"But what?" Sora said, his lean fingers tapping his arm.

"It's just complicated, I can't explain it to you," Aseles rolled her eyes. His eyes glazed and screened her face, Aseles unsure if he bought that.

"Aseles, I really am sorry," Sora sighed.

"I said it was fine...." Aseles replied.

"But you're not," Sora took a couple of paces forward, "none of it is fine anymore." Aseles looked to him, seeing his clear eyes swimming and gleaming, "Whatever we had...it's gone now...don't you feel it?"

“As bad as this sounds Sora....I think it’s best if you don’t trust me,” Aseles replied.

“Why do you say that?” Sora raised a brow.

“Because I feel that....something else is on its way,” Aseles replied. Sora looked to her, but he seemed disturbed of her reply.

“Are you sure you don’t want to tell me?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

FFW:

The gummi ship rose to the sky, leaving in a fast spark as Aseles landed onto the concrete floor, catching her balance as she looked among the gloomy atmosphere of the place. She seemed to have fallen in an open area of a graveyard, a set of gates to the left as they creaked and groaned. A set of leafless trees to her right led to a vast woods and a couple of the tombstones glowed from the lit pumpkins all around. Ahead, she could make out the entrance of an alleyway, though unsure where it would lead.

“What is this place??” Aseles blinked.

"We're in Halloween Town, right?" Goofy asked. Aseles looked to the trio, and saw that the transformation of the world had taken its toll of them, converting Sora into a vampire, Goofy into some sort of walking zombie, and Donald a mummy. Somehow the magic of logic hitting her, Aseles looked down to see her own attire, consisting of a large mage’s hat, and a vest-collared top with a fluttery-layered skirt. Reaching the mid of your thighs were high stripped, bright stockings with curved boots as for shoes. Around her lower arms was decorated into bright swirls of red, making Aseles look like a rag-doll and witch combined.

Maybe that's why this town is called Halloween Town...OH.....Duh.

“Huh, been a while since we’ve been like this huh?” Sora chuckled, pulling on one of Donald’s wrappings on his head.

“Hey! Cut that out,” Donald snapped, pulling it back.

“Gee Aseles, you changed too,” Goofy smiled, patting her large hat.

“Ahh..” she picked up her head, pulling your large hat back properly, giggling. “Not too bad yourself, Goofy.” She leaned, poking the small, lit pumpkin on Goofy’s nose.

“Hey, what about me?” Sora walked forward, smirking as he opened his arms. Aseles turned hesitantly to look at him, but her mouth dropped as she hurried forward, and literally grabbed the sides of his head, jerking it back as she leaned.

“Are those fangs real!?!” she reached, poking the edge of one.

“Don’t bite, Sora,” Goofy joked as he chuckled. Sora suddenly turned completely red as he moved Aseles’s hands away, chuckling nervously. Aseles took a step back, turning red from her sudden excitement of Sora’s teeth.

“Where are we going?” Donald asked, looking about. At that moment, Aseles heard a noise from the alleyway in the distance, and the others turned to follow her direction.

“C’mon,” Sora replied as he ran forward to it, with the others following behind him. They entered

to reach what appeared to be the Town Square, Aseles looked around to see a fountain with stone gargoyles perched around it, oozing with green liquid. The buildings and houses around were made of pure cement, some crumbling and decorated with large cobwebs and grime. Well this place looked...lively. What was strange wasn't that it fit the title of the place, but that in the very center stood a ramp, decorated in colorful lights, wreaths, mistletoes....

"You sure this is Halloween Town?" Aseles looked at Donald who only shrugged at the weird transformation of the area.

"Supposed to be," he answered.

"Then what's with all the decorations? Where's Jack?" Sora asked, heading toward the ramp. Aseles turned to her left to find wrapped presents, and hearing a jingling in the distance...?

Approaching the ramp, the group backed up to hear a loud thunderous clomp, seeing skeleton reindeers leading a big red sleigh from the back. The reindeers stomped among the wooden ramp, the sleigh ride finally stopping as they huffed. Stepping out of the red sleigh was a tall skeleton, wearing a striped dress clothes. Instantly, his stitched smirk sent Aseles quaking on the spot.

His eyes averted to the group, "Sora! Donald! Goofy! Glad to see you're back for the festival again!" the skeleton said excitedly as he dusted off his clothes. Awaiting the glance already, Aseles swiftly shifted to move behind Goofy, seeing the tall skeleton approaching.

He easily towered Goofy and looked down at Aseles, his boney hand on his hips, as the other lifted Aseles's large hat from her face, "Who might you be?"

"Uhh..." she gulped, blinking rapidly, Goofy suddenly moving out of the way. No!

"Well, then you must be a friend!" the skeleton took out his hand, suddenly smiling warmly. Aseles looked at it, back up at him, and shook his hand gently, feeling his boney fingers round over hers.

"Aseles," she answered nervously.

"Jack Skellington stands in front of you, for I am the Pumpkin King," he said, bending down on his knees and kissing her hand.

"Uh..." Aseles's could feel her cheeks turn bright red, and heard Sora clear his throat from the side.

"Hey Jack, what's with all the decorations?" Sora asked with his hands behind his head.

"Oh, right! Well I will be hosting the festival again and I decided to make a new theme," Jack answered as he took a couple of steps back, standing before the sleigh, "It was going to be Halloween, but then while I was walking down the forest, I came upon something, trying to get a new idea. Then BAM! I came upon a door. It was decorated like a tree. I was curious, but then the door opened by itself and I was pulled in! I woke up to find myself with snow, candy canes, lights, a merry-go-round, and all sorts of things beyond my wake. Then I met up with Santy Claws!" Jack heaved a breath as the four blinked to him, almost looking at him incredulously.

"Uh.....He means Santa Claus, right?" Goofy whispered. Sora shrugged.

"He told me about these wonderful things, about the thing called Christmas. So I suggested that I should do the festival about Christmas. And to make things better, I'm going to deliver presents to the little children!" Okay, even Aseles thought a tall skeleton delivering presents while going down chimneys wasn't a good idea, and by everyone else's expression, it didn't sound like a

pleasant idea either...rather a disaster ready to commence.

"Okay, so what are you going to do now?" Sora asked, clearing his throat yet again.

"I'm going to check if Sally has made my costume of course," Jack answered, "you coming?" The group nodded, and began to follow behind the gleeful Jack.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Donald said, slapping his forehead.

"I agree. Do you think that he can actually pull this off?" Aseles asked. "Not that.....I mean I just met him but...he was...pretty scary..."

"We'll have to tag along to check," Sora said, nodding.

MOMENTS LATER:

The group walked toward a pair of large gates, walking up a pair of narrow staircases to a tall house on top of a hill. Jack opened the door as the rest followed inside, immediately seeing a metal bed at the center of the room with a desk occupied by someone sitting in front of it, and large bookcases at the sides at the left. Above the center of the metal table were large devices holding all sorts of....sharp gadgets. Great.

"Aseles, this is Dr. Finkelstein," Jack said, introducing her to the one sitting in front of the desk. She approached with Jack beside, seeing it was someone disabled in a wheelchair, holding a form of some sort of mechanical duck....what? Dr. Finkelstein then turned his wheelchair around to look at her, wearing a lab coat with a metal plate around his head.

"Oh, you must be a friend of the lads huh?" he asked. Aseles nodded, but she was ultimately disgusted the moment she saw the man had opened his head, literally, to scratch his brain. Oh, there goes her appetite.

"And I want you to meet Sally," Jack said, leading Aseles enthusiastically to a lady doll that was sitting in a wooden chair near the bookcases, sewing a suit that appeared to be of that resembling Santa Claus's costume.

"Nice to meet you," Sally answered as Aseles approached.

"Nice to meet you too," Aseles smiled. She returned it, moving her long, yawn red hair out of the way. She was covered in stitches, holding a bluish color to her skin and holding several patches of different colors and patterns to keep her intact.

"Are you almost done with the costume Sally? I'll need it soon," Jack asked politely to Sally.

"Almost, but I have a terrible feeling about this Jack. Will you please do something else for the festival?" Sally asked. Even she was getting the bad hives about this.

"I will, after this," Jack replied. He kindly took the costume and put it on as the rest watched, unsure what to say about him not having flesh to really seal the deal. He then placed a fake, white beard on himself and stood straight, "It's perfect!"

The four glanced at one another, shrugging as Sally stood, holding her hands and rubbing them nervously. Jack was quick to thank Sally and the doctor as he walked to the exit, the rest quickly following behind him as he headed through the Town Square and headed to the graveyard, the rest unsure where he was going exactly, but didn't ask. He was quick to head toward the woods, and Aseles could only guess he was going to show them the door he was speaking of earlier.

The forest was filled with death and silence, the bared trees stretching up, almost disappearing into the night sky as Jack continued to lead. The moon lit most of the way as Jack turned a few times, and again was in the light. Aseles shivered from the cold, following close beside Donald. Finally they seemed to have reached the end, seeing there stood a centered tree, holding a door shape of a pine tree, coated with similar lights Aseles had seen earlier, and a yellow star perched at its very top. Instantly, she captured the image of a Christmas tree.

Jack neared it and opened the door, turning his malicious gaze to them all, "Coming?"

"Uh...where exactly are we going?" Sora questioned.

"Christmas Town of course!" Jack nodded. The group shared glances to each other but approached somewhat eagerly, looking inside. As they looked over, Aseles leaned to see there was nothing but a really dark pit of a fall.

"Do we just jump...inside?" Sora asked, looking back to Jack. Jack suddenly took position behind the four, and he smashed his hands forward, pushing all four travelers down the pit of darkness. Aseles shouted in surprise as she continued to tumble down, holding onto Sora's arm as he had held onto Goofy who gripped Donald last, the four spinning and twirling in a cold vortex of white.

One second she floated, and the next she was thrown out, feeling a patch of cold hit her face. Aseles groaned as she lifted her head from the cold substance. She began to stand, but fell onto her face once more from the massive weight behind her.

"What a soft landing..." Goofy coughed.

"Thas begus you're on top of meh!" Aseles breathed out, flailing her arms. The weight diminished hurriedly as she pulled her face out of the snow, gasping for air. Wait...snow???

Aseles looked around, shaking her head and rubbing the snow off of her eyelashes. She kneeled as she looked ahead and down the hill they all kneeled on. Her mouth dropped open, feeling Sora, Donald and Goofy lifting themselves up to their knees.

"What is it Aseles?" Sora asked, looking to her. Aseles's eyes sparkled at the sight as she hurriedly stood. Sora, Donald and Goofy did the same, following her gaze as Jack stepped out of the doorway, closing it behind him.

"Whoa!" was all Sora could only say. At the bottom of the hill was a large valley, coated in all snow where a department of red buildings stood around in a circular formation. He was the first to run as Aseles kicked snow behind her as she followed, heaving as the two reached the entrance of the place, guarded by two large candy canes at the sides. Sora stood flabbergasted from the harmonic view of what seemed to be Santa's whereabouts.

A merry-go-round was at the very center, holding beautifully decorated animals with bright Christmas lights hanging from every direction, coating the ground in various, shimmering colors. It was a little red town, with wreathes and mistletoes hanging among the doorways.

"Is that really where Santa Claus lives?" Sora asked excitedly to the approaching Donald, Goofy and Jack.

"You bet!" Jack smirked.

"Cool!" Sora and Aseles cheered as they both ran forward. Suddenly they skidded to a stop, looking among the black orbs forming in midair. The Heartless appeared in various numbers, two jack-in-the-boxes with axed pumpkin-heads and a couple of drilling creatures.

"Heartless!" Sora yelled out slashing his keyblade out and charging into the fleet of enemies. The rest were quick to follow as Aseles threw her keyblade side to side as she follow behind Sora, leaping up and slamming her keyblade down into the snow, catching two Heartless in the attack.

The Heartless in their pop-up boxes seemed more of a challenge to destroy, seeing as they shifted from different attacks, but as quick as they had come, the battle ended with Sora and Aseles running to the large house at the end. Aseles made it first as she knocked on the door, grinning as she looked back, but the triumphant expression subsided.

"Aseles!" Sora began to skid across the snow, his mouth open in shock as he suddenly flew forward, bumping into her as both fell through the door, falling onto the hard, wooden floor face-first.

"Owww....." Aseles groaned, stumbling to her feet.

"Sorry," Sora apologized rubbing his head as his eyes rolled in their sockets.

"Are you alright, children?" Sora and Aseles both looked up, frozen to see a short, stubby man at the end of the hallway, wearing the most idealized garment of Santa Claus. Holy crap....

"Sorry for...uh...." Aseles began.

"Are you really Santa???" Sora loomed over the man once he stood his hands in fists in front of him. The man stared, but nodded the next moment, chuckling.

"Awesome!" Sora exclaimed, Aseles turning to see Jack, Donald, and Goofy finally making their way inside.

"Hey, it's Santy Claws!" Jack said, bending his upper body to tower over Sora, saying hello to the one and only Santa Claus below.

"Nice to meet the Pumpkin King, but you're getting in a little trouble I must say," Santa wagged his finger, walking down to his left as Sora and Aseles eagerly followed, peeking to see a comfy living room with a few couches, a little table in the center, and a fireplace at the center wall at their right.

"What about us?!" Sora, Donald, Goofy and Aseles interjected at once, making Santa sit on one of the chair unwillingly. He gave a cough and reached into his pocket, pulling out a scroll of a list that soon unrolled, passing his feet and rolling down the floor to hit the far wall.

"Let's see now," he said, looking at Donald first, "Name?" Lucky duck.

"Donald Duck!" Donald gleamed with a smile.

"Hmmm....You've been on my Nice List for quite some time now." Donald gave a happy cheer. "Next?"

"Goofy, sir," Goofy came up next, holding his hat in his hands.

"Goofy, I must say, you're a special person since you have been on my Nice List for such a long time now." Goofy gave a chuckle. Sora was quick to step forward, playfully pushing Aseles behind him. Aseles narrowed her eyes, pouting.

"Sora, sir!" Sora replied excitedly.

Santa's eyes averted downward on the list, "Sora, Sora, Sora...you're a good, wonderful friend, but when I checked, I found that you did not believe in Santa seven years go." OH HO.....BUMMER.

Sora's mouth fell open and he walked past Aseles, whispering something under his breath. "RIKU!"

"Aseles, sir," she replied genuinely as she stepped up to stand in front of him.

It took a few minutes before he seemed to have found her name, "You have been lying several times now, even though you believe you do it with good intentions. I'm sorry to say this to a young lady, but you are in my Naughty List as well. You have extended your friendship at a very long range, and I'm proud of that."

"WHAT?" Aseles gasped out, though she walked away, looking at the ceiling and then planted her hands against her face. Holy crap, she was on Santa's Naughty List. Wow, first time meeting Santa and she was on his Naughty List.

"At least...I'm not the only one," Sora whispered. Aseles looked up to him, feeling him nudge his arm to her as she giggled softly, shaking her head.

"You naughty boy," Aseles shook her head, "Not believing in Santa..."

"IT was Riku...." Sora quickly cut in, smacking his arms on his chest and grumbled.

"Santy Claws, would it be alright to ask a favor?" Jack asked. Santa nodded. "Would it be alright if I deliver the presents for you?"

Santa jumped in shock in his seat, "I'm sorry Jack, but that job is up to me, it's my responsibility. You are the Pumpkin King, King of Halloween. You must stick to that personality and not take someone else's." Sora, Donald, Goofy and Aseles shifted their eyes to each other then up to Jack could only stare in surprise. Suddenly, a crash was heard from the door at the other side of the room.

"Oh dear!" Santa said, "Will you all check what's happening in the Workshop, I'm just far too tired to handle this."

"Of course!" Jack said before the rest could only comply, running to the door of the Workshop.

Inside, Jack led the way running up some stairs, Aseles looking around to see they entered some sort of toy-workshop at the top, with grappling machines and shifting platforms at their right when they began to shoot up the stairs. Inside the small workshop above, toys and gift wrappings were scattered everywhere, some colorful paper and half destroyed toys among the floor.

"Hey, you!" Sora said, pointing to three little kids on a conveyer belt at the far side. Jack quickly closed and locked the door, preventing any escape.

"Lock, Shock, Barrel!" Jack yelled and instantly the three, little kids could only laugh, the dressed witch cackling excitedly. The dressed devil child began to laugh, throwing boxes toward them as his two other comrades copied, and seeming like the ring leader of the group.

Sora took out his keyblade and hit one of the boxes, sending it to the one with the circle skeleton mask. The child was thrown back and captured in the box, shaking in it, trying to get out. The idea was in plain sight.

"Everyone grab a box!" Jack shouted as the group all relinquished their weapons, reaching and

picking up the decorated cardboard boxes that were scattered among the ground.

Aseles jumped forward, missing the witch as she skidded across the ground and the devil-dressed child jumping across everyone's head, making Goofy fall on his back. They continued to run around, yelling and screaming around the place. Jack finally caught the little witch, leaving the one dressed as a devil the last one. Goofy and Donald tried to catch him but failed, crashing into each other's boxes with Donald headfirst in it with Goofy's rear caught at the bottom of it with his arms and legs sticking out.

Aseles jumped in the air, flying with the box wide open to the masked boy who ran in quick speed to the wall. She fell onto her side, seeing Sora charging this time as he launched the box forward, giving it a strong kick as it twirled in the air. The opened rushed to the wall as the little boy plopped forward, caught in Sora's box as he banged from within it.

"Let me out!!" he shouted, banging on the top of the box. The others chuckled as Jack carried the one with the little girl and Goofy holding the small box containing the third child. After a quick opening, the three were tied down with ribbons, preventing them from escaping.

"What are you three doing here?" Jack asked as the three little kids sat on the middle of the floor back-to-back, his finger pointed right at them.

The one that was dressed as a witch looked at the group, "It was Lock's idea!"

"No, it was Barrel's idea!" Lock, the devil child, pointed to the one with a circled head.

"No it was Shock's idea!" Barrel answered back, "Wait, wasn't this Oogie's idea?"

"Oogie's!" Everyone yelled...except for Aseles. Ow that was loud. Lock and Shock hit Barrel on the head with the sides of their heads.

"Oogie isn't alive, we defeated him last time!" Jack argued with a fist on the palm of the other.

"No he isn't, he's alive, ready, and eviler than before! He will make sure to put you all straight!" Lock shouted.

"Yeah!" Shock and Barrel yelled.

"How did he even come back?" Sora narrowed his eyes.

"We're not telling you!" the three little kids shouted back at him, throwing raspberries. Well, Sora was good with kids, that's for sure.

"Alright then. We'll let you go if you three promise to behave," Jack said, his foot tapping.

The three little kids looked at each other and nodded, "Yes." WAIT....he was just going to let them go like that?

"Good," Jack said, removing the ribbons with one swoops of his long fingers, and stepped out of the way that led to the door. The three kids stood on their feet, running to the opened window. Being two stories high, the group ran to look to see them plop down safely onto the hill of snow below, running from the town upward to the hillside.

"I've got a bad feeling about this," Donald had his hands on his hips.

"They were convincing to me," Sora said, his hands behind his head.



"I agree with Sora," Goofy and Jack said.

"How were they convincing?" Donald asked as Aseles smacked her forehead.

BACK WITH SANTA:

"You won't be bothered again, Santy Claws, we took good care of it," Jack said proudly, placing his bony hands on his sides. Santa thanked them for the assistance, and the group was now heading out of Santa's house and started to head back through the deep thick snow to Halloween Town.

"We still have to deliver the presents," Jack suddenly said. The group all shot a stare at him.

"I thought Santa said to not do anything with it," Donald said.

"Well, we're going to be doing him a favor." Cue facepalm.

"I don't think it will be the sweetest favor if you ask me," Aseles answered.

"Besides, we have to find out if Oogie Boogie is back," Sora reminded, but Jack seemed to pay no attention as he led the way toward Halloween Town with Aseles's stomach brewing a nasty spell.

On the way, it was explained that a sack of bugs named Oogie Boogie had tried to take over Halloween Town previously with the help of Lock, Shock, and Barrel (Aseles was unsurprised why she had bad vibes with them). Dr. Finkelstein had tried to make a heart for Jack's dancing Heartless for the festival, but malfunctioned and was taken by Lock, Shock, and Barrel on Oogie's orders.

"So, you're telling me that we have to stop Oogie from taking Halloween Town, again. Right?" Aseles replied. Her trio nodded. "Well....great."

"Don't be fooled by his appearance. He can do evil, horrible things," Jack said, narrowing his eyes immediately. Aseles nervously stepped behind Goofy again.

"Don't worry, we'll be there, fighting with you," Sora reassured. The group began to make their way through the forest yet again, feeling instantly warmer prior to the cold snow before.

"Hey, what's that?" Aseles asked. Everyone looked ahead, looking to see a white bright object headed their way.

"Zero!" Jack yelled out, walking toward the small, ghost dog. It was only a sheet of blanket, two eye holes cut through, and a small little pumpkin on the tip of its nose as it glowed brightly. The day of seeing a cute ghost...that was indeed today.

"You do remember Sora, Donald, and Goofy?" Zero was quick to circle around Sora and the others, making some happy yips as the others laughed.

"That's so cool," Aseles said, kneeling as the little dog approached, sniffing one of her naked knees. She reached and stroked its head tenderly, amazed to feel the fabric of silk, surprised that she could even touch it. The dog shut its eyes in delight, licking her hand as she giggled. The moment didn't last long as Zero suddenly lurched back, looking around and frowning.

"What is it boy?" Jack asked as Aseles stood, seeing Zero beginning to float off and heading to the gates ahead, toward the main Graveyard. Jack was first to lead, opening the gates as Zero merely phased through them, Sora holding the door open as Donald, Goofy and Aseles shot

through.

The ground was engraved in small crevices of dark dirt, all swirling toward the main, curved hill at the very center. The moon was almost perched on its limping head, and Aseles noticed that the hill was actually moving.

"On guard!" Jack yelled, stopping in his tracks. They all bolted to stop, the sound of whirring portals collecting in the air with countless zombies forming. Their arms limped down with massive, sharp claws, their eyes the only visible feature popping out of their bandaged faces and bodies. Yellow bright eyes coated the ground, the floor almost moving underneath as Aseles began to strike among her space, huddled back to back with the others.

"Ah!" Donald yelled out, sending a swirl of flames around his feet.

"How'll we defeat these guys?" Goofy asked protecting himself with his shield as the Heartless began to claw their arms downward like dropping hammers.

"We fight of course!" Jack yelled out and threw his bony palm up toward the sky, casting a large Thunder spell, striking down endless emerging Heartless at once.

"Split up, we'll cover more ground," Sora commanded, and unexpectedly Aseles found her back naked. Great.

She charged forward, swinging her keyblade to and fro in spins as she leapt forward, catching a few Heartless in the attack. They flew backwards as several were quick to stand, throwing themselves up and heading down to her. Aseles shot her keyblade forward, sending a massive ring of flames forward, and the explosion ringing among the thick air. Aseles continued to strike downward at the Heartless lurking on the ground, but were easy to handle as she looked up to see the others had finished their own torments of Heartless.

"Let's go!" Sora called out as he began to lead the way toward the reopened gates. However, everyone froze in their sprints, looking to see Maleficent stand at the gates, her green skin flashing among the light of the moon, along with a slight wicked smirk.

"Hey!" Sora yelled, but she suddenly disappeared in black and green smoke. They turned to see three small figures approaching, with a sack of fabric walking into view behind them that held a large, open grin.

"Oogie, what are you doing here?" Jack asked angrily.

"To take over the town of course! Lock, Shock, Barrel, hit it!" Oogie shouted.

Behind Aseles heard the clanking of metal, her mouth dropping as Lock, Shock and Barrel stood on the edge of the hill. Looming over and completely shadowing them was a creature so bizarre, with a robotic, curve plate for its body as it seemed to be popping out. It wore a warlock hat with long, drooping sleeves for its boney fingers, with a rotating rim at the bottom of its body where a birdcage seemed to be dangling. Probably the most protruding feature was its large mouth and jaws....not good.

Unexpectedly, the bird cage door opened with Lock, Shock and Barrel jumping inside. At the corner of her eye, the gates began to close, seeing Oogie making a break for it to the woods.

"Hey!" Aseles yelled, barely managing to squeeze through the gates as she followed right behind him.

"Aseles!" Sora yelled after you, but his hands slammed against the closed gates, and turned his

attention back to the Heartless that was attacking the others.

Aseles huffed as she swung her keyblade in hand, tossing it across but missing as Oogie dodged the oncoming blows by ducking in the trees. Aseles snarled as she collected her keyblade from the ground, and continued in hot pursuit. She had lost him momentarily until she heard a cry of a woman screaming, sounding like Sally.

Aseles skid into view, seeing Sally was on the floor. Aseles quickly headed over to her, helping her up to her feet.

“Oogie took Santa!” Sally covered her mouth worriedly.

“I’ll go get him! Be sure to tell the others!” Aseles replied quickly. Sally nodded as she obeyed, beginning to run back toward the exit of the woods as Aseles tried desperately to remember where that blasted, Christmas tree was. She dashed forward, and her eyes widened to see the door was just a few yards away.

As she began to reach it, she abruptly skidded to a halt, seeing that nothing else spoke joy than the Organization XIII member approaching from the black fog.

“Again?” Aseles huffed. “I’m in a hurry, so if you don’t mind moving....”

The member shot out his arms at his sides, and two circle-spiked red weapons appeared. Chakrams. Aseles took a step back, ultimately disliking his visit already. The member then took a huge leap into the air, throwing his weapons forward as Aseles dodged, rolling across the ground. She struck down as he swung them again, making one strike to the floor and stick there as the other was smacked right on the side, Aseles making it hurl toward Axel.

"What's so funny?!" Aseles yelled out, hearing Axel beginning to laugh.

“You’ve gotten stronger. I like that,” Axel chuckled, swinging his one weapon in hand freely. “I came to see how you were doing.”

“And what made you do such a nice thing?” Aseles sarcastically asked. “I don’t know what it is you’re planning, but I’m not buying any of it. I’m tired of you guys interrupting me in dire moments.”

“I simply came to check up on you...” Axel replied more firmly. Aseles gave him a questionable look, and he was suddenly backing up into the formulating dark portal, and left Aseles alone a second later. Aseles quickly looked down, seeing that his second Chakram as left. Axel really did leave.

“Aseles!” Aseles turned, seeing Sora and the others approaching hurriedly into view. Aseles motioned them to hurry as she began to lead the way, immediately jumping into the pit of the Christmas tree as the others followed right behind her.

**MOMENTS LATER:**

It was not hard to follow the tracks made by Oogie, and they lead right to Santa’s House at the far end. Barging in, Aseles and Sora had kicked the door open and began to head to the Workshop at the right. Once inside, the whole conveyer belts and platforms were decorated in Halloween ornaments, from cobwebs to hanging skeletons. Seriously, how did this bag of bugs decorate so quickly? In the middle rotating panel was Santa with Oogie Boogie tying him up.

"What do you think you're doing?!" Sora yelled out. Oogie looked up at their arrival, cackling.

"We'll, if it ain't Jack and his little hotshots to help him out, huh? I'll tell you what I'm doing! I'm going to destroy Santa of course! HAHAAHA! And take over this little town too!" Oogie yelled out, grabbing his stomach in laughter. Unexpectedly to the side, Sally came into view, creeping up as she looked to the five of them, signaling to keep quite.

"The first thing I'm going to do is get rid of you pipsqueaks!" Oogie continued with his back turned to Santa. Sally proceeded to head to Santa on the belt, removing his ropes as Santa could only nod thanks. "And to make it all better for me and worse for you, I will take over Halloween Town as well, making its entire people obey my commands with the Heartless I will control!" Hurriedly, Sora, Donald, Goofy, Jack and Aseles hopped onto the platform Oogie stood on, weapons out. "What are all you smiling about?!" Oogie then turned around, finding Sally and Santa escaping toward the back door. He gasped in shock, ready to stop then until Donald and Goofy blocked his way.

"Enough of this! It's over Oogie!" Jack yelled out.

"Not for long!" Oogie waved a flipper hand as the conveyer belts began to lurch in movement, the whole sides of each holding barriers. Great.

Oogie had managed to hold out a remote control, pushing a red button as a platform eased down to let him climb on. He closed the gate as Aseles rushed to him, swinging her keyblade but missing narrowly as she fell forward, grunting. At the end of the conveyer belt was an opening row of rotating knives, all sparking into life as Aseles quickly stood up, feeling Goofy pull her up onto her feet.

The group began to run in the opposite, though they were surrounded by the Heartless zombies, making Aseles stumble backwards. She screamed as she found herself flipped over, thrown into some dark. The blue ring around her pulsed as she was suddenly thrown forward, falling onto a different conveyer belt at the side. She shook her head as she stood, seeing that Donald and Goofy had been sucked to be at the far end, with Sora and Jack at the center. Aseles looked up, growling to see Oogie coming her way.

Aseles shot her keyblade toward him, sending a whole wave of Thunder to him. The bolts crashed onto the bottom of his platform, the ashes dispersing within her barrier. She coughed strongly, seeing Oogie had fallen onto the conveyer belt, and Aseles wasted no time in smacking him to his feet as his back hit the barrier.

He staggered to his feet, "You little brat!" He suddenly threw two blinking, purple dices to Aseles. Before she could react, the massive explosion sent her flying back, making her hit the floor. She struggled to stand, only to see Oogie had escaped to the platform and leaving Heartless as a gift. Aseles hurried to reduce their numbers, wincing and dodging to her best abilities to dodge and endure the hits.

The conveyer belt suddenly raced as Aseles found herself sucked back inside with a yelped, and once again she was thrown forward, thudding into Donald in the middle belt with Jack alone at the right and Goofy and Sora on the left.

More Heartless appeared as Donald cast spells to protect the two as Aseles decreased their numbers with her newly found Thunder spell, but soon the alliance couldn't hold as the conveyer races once more, throwing everyone inside as Aseles ended up with Jack this time, Sora alone in the center and Donald and Goofy at the other far end.

"Up there!" Jack hissed as he pointed a bony finger to Oogie who stood at the wavering platform above. Aseles pointed her keyblade up, throwing several large orbs of Fire spells. The platform below him fell as he crashed down, landing in front of Sora who now took the battle in his own

hands, striking down Oogie relentlessly with every free chance he had.

With a desperate attempt to keep himself alive, Oogie sent Sora flying to the side, making him hit the barrier, hard. Sora staggered on his feet as Oogie chuckled lowly, approaching. Aseles's eyes burned red as she lifted her flaming keyblade, striking at the barrier at the side. A crackle was heard, and suddenly all the barriers were dropped and falling to the ground in light clatters of glass. The rotating conveyer belts halted as Oogie looked over nervously at her, the remaining Heartless disappearing. Aseles shot forward as she tossed Oogie off of Sora, her keyblade spinning in her hand wildly as her hair shot up in flames.

"Aseles!" Aseles shot her eyes behind her, seeing Sora had taken hold of her arm. Aseles blinked, but immediately felt herself land on the floor on her feet, her hair falling back around her shoulders. She swallowed as she looked at her body, seeing that she had reverted back to normal.

Oogie laughed nervously from the end, "Come on, no hard feelings, right? We're best buddies, Jack?" The group went forward to stand on either side of Sora, staring unremorsefully at the bag of bugs.

Jack, Sora, Donald and Aseles pointed their weapons to Oogie, "THUNDER!"

Oogie gasped with his sack belly opening from the sharp attack, the bugs falling out all over the floor. He tried to contain the falling insects within his bag, but did not expect Goofy to throw his shield at him. Oogie lost consciousness as Goofy's shield fell back into his hand, all of them looking to see Oogie beginning to diminish in size, soon becoming nothing but a bag of cloth, empty and shallow on the platform.

"So, about those presents," Jack said, breaking the silence. The group looked to him in disbelief.

FFW:

"Thank you so much for rescuing me, and Christmas as well," Santa said, patting his clothes for dirt. The group settled to stand outside his house as he stood at the door. It was just a hassle picking up those bugs...

"Santa," Jack started.

"Jack, you must leave Christmas to me," Santa started. The rest reclaimed their silence, glancing at Jack, "Christmas is my responsibility, not yours. How would you like it if I tried to take Halloween from you?"

"I wouldn't much like it," Jack said, scratching his skull, looking down at his Christmas costume.

"Exactly. So you must stick to be the Pumpkin King while I stick to Christmas," Santa smiled. Jack looked up to him, but smiled politely back, seeming to get the picture....FINALLY.

Sora walked forward, the rest of the group looking to his direction as he approached Santa, "Santa, can I ask you something?" Santa nodded. "Do you know where Riku might be?"

"My dear boy, I'm not sure where that lad is right now."

"Oh," Sora said, his eyes dropping in disappoint.

"But don't lose hope, for if you stop believing now, you may never find him. A boy like you would sure be able to find Riku in no time," Santa finished, patting Sora on the back.

Sora smiled back, nodding once, "Yeah...thanks." He bowed his head to Santa one last time and began to make his way toward the rest, leading the way through the thick snow and up the hill

leading to Halloween Town.

#### AT THE TOWN SQUARE:

"Will you stick to Halloween, Jack?" Sally asked palms placed together on her chest, walking next to the tall man.

"Of course, and better yet, I'll stick to the suit, it's lovely how you made it," Jack answered, making Sally blush. Aseles smiled in their direction, turning to see Sora, Donald and Goofy looking over to her, indicating it was time to leave.

"We'll be seeing you guys later," Sora waved to both Jack and Sally to get their attention.

"You will visit, right?" Jack asked.

"Yeah, of course," Donald nodded gleefully.

"Promise!" Goofy and Sora finished. Jack and Sally gave their final goodbyes as four started to walk toward the alleyway once more. Zero barked a goodbye as they made their way to the Graveyard, heading to Moonlight Hill as the gummi ship waited at the top of the curved hill. Climbing aboard proved to be a blessing as Aseles sighed, falling into her seat as her normal clothes emerged once the ship took off into the sky.

Placing her elbows on her knees, Aseles rubbed her face gently and figured it was best to take the time to relax and not think so much of things. There were already numerous things whispering at the back of her mind, making her slightly worry if she continued to progress. Closing her eyes, she shifted her head to the side, sighing deeply once more, and welcoming the slumber that greeted her among the dark abyss of her thoughts.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Her body felt stiff among the marble floor, the side of her face pressed against the cold surface. She looked ahead, seeing a pair of doors were straight ahead, but they were slightly opened ajar. She felt someone shift behind her, and then she realized she was not on the floor, but she was pressed against the marble wall, her ponytail gripped and pushing her face further into the white stone.*

*"You're wasting time the further you venture forth. The leader will not like this one bit," the sharp voice behind her announced.*

*"You won't tell me what you want with me...."*

*"You are fooling yourself with these 'friends'; you must decide who your true family really is."*

*"Why do I get the feeling it's not with you members...?" Aseles huffed out, feeling her face squishing further. "You're pushing me too hard...you're asking for too much vigorously, repeatedly. Family doesn't do that....family waits for you."*

*"You little, naïve girl..."*

"Hey, Aseles, you okay?" Aseles felt her eyelashes flickering slowly. She blinked, suddenly finding a small, pink nose in front of her view. The face of animal sparked into view as she bolted back.

"Whoa!" she fell onto her side onto the dirt floor with a thud. Aseles looked back up; seeing Sora completely transformed...well at least she thought it was him. She lifted a hand, but her eyes

widened to see a paw had replaced her palm, blinking past it as she looked up the darkened lion cub sitting in front with a smile.

“What happened?!” Aseles wobbled onto her feet, slipping once as she looked back, seeing her body had shortened and shrunk in size, nothing but fur covering her whole body of a feline. Looking to the side, a small puddle waited as she hurried over, falling several times as she spit out the dirt.

She belly-crawled instead, reaching the edge of the liquid and peering over to see pointed ears, following by a scruffy head. Her fur was darkened that of brown, sizzling all over the body and at the base of her tail. She ducked her head down, looking to see at her belly, then back at the puddle more closely. The tip of her pink nose touched the edge of it, creating a ripple of her image as Aseles sat up, legs parted open at her sides with her front paws holding her upright from the center.

“What happened to us?” Aseles tried to stand on all fours, but thought better and remained in her sitting position, slouching as she looked to the Sora lion cub. Coming to his side was the flapping bird Donald, and out of all animals, Goofy ended up being a turtle, again, with his shield strapped to his back.

“It’s so cool!” Sora said, looking at himself as he opened his paws, wriggling his claws in and out of view.

“Is it me or is everything slow now?” Goofy asked.

“You’re a turtle, Goofy,” Aseles stared blankly. The three turned to Donald, seeing him land beside Sora, his white wings stretched out at his sides.

“Aren’t you having trouble?” Aseles questioned, feeling somewhat betrayed of his easy transformation.

“How can he, he’s already a bird brain,” Sora said.

“Right! Huh? Hey!” Donald yelled, Goofy snickering as Sora cleared his throat.

“I’m guessing you guys haven’t....been to this world,” Aseles began to push herself on all four, walking in place as she tried to get the feeling into her legs.

“Not that we know of...” Goofy replied, titling his head. “Hmmm.”

“Something’s familiar, but I’m not sure,” Sora answered, walking around as his tail flopped behind him. Aseles couldn’t help but blow up her cheeks, trying not to laugh as she found Sora’s transformation quite entertaining.

“What’s so funny?” Sora asked, turning his gaze to her.

“...Nothing,” she replied as she walked to the opposite direction, containing her smirk. After a few minutes, she seemed to grasp the feeling of walking on all fours, after reciting several commands to herself on which foot goes first. Looking around her surroundings, the place was deserted and gloomy, the rock walls almost decaying in the gray area with bones and rocks embedded into the dry soil. Sora began to lead the way as the rest followed close behind, seeing an elephant skull standing at the center, its concave features shadowed deeply from the hiding sun in the dim clouds.

“I don’t have a very good feeling here,” Goofy replied as Aseles stuck herself next to him, Donald flying overhead between Sora and Goofy. Suddenly, there was unstoppable laughter erupting

around the air. Aseles froze as Goofy did the same, her eyes looking around as Donald called out his wand to his feet, clutching it tightly in possession. Sora flashed out his keyblade as he held it between his jaws. Wondering in those seconds on how he did that, Aseles followed suite, dropping her head gently from the sudden weight in her mouth. At least her hands were clean the last time she touched it.

The laughs suddenly stopped as the four waited, then heard loud roars and thuds in the distance, still somewhere nearby.

“Come on!” Sora led the way, running head first with the rest behind him, Goofy spinning his shell to go faster. They cut inside a curving rock wall, seeing two, huge Heartlesses (appearing what seemed to be rhinos), cornering a female lion against the rock wall. She snarled at them, but she was losing the battle.

Sora sprinted forward, sliding to stand in front of the hurt lioness, the rest right beside him, “Go, we’ll take care of them!” Sora ordered her. She nodded and staggered quick on her feet, ducking by a nearby crevice as the four readied themselves and advanced to attack the charging Living Bone Heartlesses. Donald and Aseles teamed up to take one and moved it away from any connection of the other, Sora and Goofy occupying themselves with their own feat. Aseles struck her mouth downward to catch the Heartless’s face, cringing at the swift movement on her neck. Obviously, it wasn’t going to be a breeze fighting in this world.

Donald maneuvered himself easily across the air as he swung his staff downward, throwing numerous Blizzard and Fire spells as the Heartless took charge at him, but missing greatly as Donald took to the skies. Aseles pointed her keyblade to the dirt floor, creating a slippery, cold surface of ice as the running and leaping Heartless skid across the ground, crashing into the rock wall. She took her chance to tackle, swinging her keyblade around with Donald assisting the assault. Panting, Aseles backed up as the Heartless took its disappearing leave, leaving a radiating pink heart escaping to the sky. Looking back, Sora and Goofy had finished their own Heartless, hurrying over to check everyone’s conditions. A little shaky, but everyone seemed fine.

The lioness from before made her entrance out, walking to the four as they all turned, facing her, “Thanks for saving me. I didn’t know what those things were.”

“It’s okay,” Sora said as everyone dismissed their weapons, gathering in a circle, “We’re all glad we came in time.”

“How come you were here alone?” Donald asked, landing on top of Goofy’s shell.

“I was searching for help,” she answered.

“For what?” Sora asked, interested.

“You see, we have a king for Pride Rock, but he’s chased away the food and has left a great drought, making the rest of the lionesses miserable. I set out to look for help, to find a lion to overthrow him. But there seems to be no one, except-“ she turned, and then landed her widening eyes to Sora, “What about you, can you do it!” Uh oh.

“HUH?” Sora answered, taking a bit of time to register her comment. He glanced to the rest as they all raised an eyebrow in the lioness’s direction, Donald probably slapping his face on the inside. Sora as king?

“Uh, I guess, but-“ Sora shrugged.

“Great! Come on!” the lioness answered. Sora suddenly gave a confident look, walking forward



as the three exchanged glances, nodding that Sora had indeed completely let the statement suffocate his mind. "Oh, by the way, the name's Nala," the lioness replied, looking back.

"Sora," Sora answered, pointing the rest of his group out, "and this is Donald, Goofy, and Aseles."

"Nice to meet you all," Nala answered with a smile, continuing to walk.

Approaching the dry Savannah and leaving the deserted Elephant Graveyard behind, Aseles picked up her pace next to Sora, narrowing her eyes at him, "What do you think you're doing?"

"Doing what?" Sora raised an eyebrow.

"You know what I'm talking about. You can't be king," she huffed, Goofy and Donald coming closer into the huddle, seeming to agree with their expressions.

"I know, but it would be so awesome just to be king for just a minute."

"That doesn't mean you should," Donald crossed his wings together, tapping his foot on top of Goofy's shell.

"We'll just help, that's all," Sora shrugged, not swayed to be changing his mind.

"Isn't that...muddling?" Goofy questioned.

"Meddling!" Donald hissed, rolling his eyes.

"Is...everything okay?" The four shot their attention to Nala, seeing she had stopped with her head tilted in their direction..

"YEAH! OH YEAH! EVERYTHING'S ALRIGHT!" the group chimed in. Nala gave a smile and continued forth as the rest followed behind, quite unsure how to deal with Sora's rash decision. At least, Donald and Goofy seemed to stick to the idea of not meddling in other people's affairs.

"So, when do we see the evil king?" Sora asked. Here he goes again.

"Not yet, we have to see Rafiki," Nala replied with a slight nod, her paws slightly dented in the dusty floor with each pass.

"Rafi-what?" Aseles asked.

"Rafiki, he'll say whether Sora is well enough to be king and overthrow Scar," she answered. Oh good...someone to stop this madness.

"Scar?" Goofy and Donald asked.

Nala stopped and turned to look at all of you, blinking, "That's the evil king....Wait....You're not from here are you?" Oh snap.

"Well," Sora started, but was cut off by Donald, "Just dropping by."

"Oh, I see, but let's see if it's worth a shot," Nala continued and led the way. Nice save Donald.

Continuing their venture forth through the isolated, dying terrain, a large boulder was at the distance, one boulder held upright by another below it, stretching across and over Aseles's head to shape the letter "L" toward where the sun rose. It seemed sturdy in place, despite the short

numbered of boulders along its rims and basement. At the top of the walking surface, a cave darkened in black shadow, and somehow Aseles guessed that was where Scar was resting with the other lionesses. Talk about invading property.

“Here, quickly! We can’t let Scar see us yet!” Nala whispered. No kidding.

They all hurried and dashed past the lower exterior of the large stretching boulder, holding their breaths and hurrying toward a small entrance at the side of the structure, a green tree almost marking the entrance. Nala led the way in as Sora looked over his shoulder, the rest copying and following Nala inside. Once inside, Aseles felt immediately safe, looking at the large tree trunk that stationed at the far end of the small room, towering into the bright sky above.

There were painted pictures on the hard wood wall with several necklaces and leaves hanging from the small branches stretching out from above as they hung low into view. The gushing wind howled above as the necklaces slightly rung, illuminating the room in a soft atmosphere, more welcoming than the plains outside. The shadows of the tree trunk were deep and darkened, contrasting to the bright colors on it. At the side awaited a baboon who sat crisscrossed, almost meditating. His large eyes opened as he watched them enter, standing up as he held a carved staff with jingling shells at the orb on top.

“This is Rafiki,” Nala introduced as she signaled for the group to wait, walking over to Rafiki. They began to talk amongst themselves, Rafiki looking over several times at the group.

“What do you think they’re talking about?” Goofy whispered.

“Of why we’re here I suppose,” Donald whispered back, shrugging.

“You think you can really pull it off?” Aseles whispered to Sora.

He looked to her, “It’s worth a shot.” The four immediately shushed as the baboon approached, stopping particularly in front of Sora. Sora blinked at his sudden intent inspection, the monkey holding his chin and stroking his white beard. Donald, Goofy and Aseles gave glances as Sora stood there, only able to look at Rafiki the same way. The monkey then went back to Nala, shaking his head.

Nala confronted them a couple of seconds later, sighing in defeat, “It looks like you can’t be king, Sora.”

Sora slightly scowled, “Isn’t there anyone else to be king?”

Nala sighed, “There was. He was brave, confident...but he died with his father a couple of years ago. How much I miss Simba...”

“SIMBA?!” Sora, Donald, and Goofy asked abruptly, making Aseles jump. Jeezes...with the surprising yells.

“Simba’s okay, what are you talking about?” Sora interjected. Rafiki was immediately influenced in the conversation, approaching as he narrowed his eyes to Sora’s claim.

“You know him?” Nala asked happily, not really questioning whether Sora was lying or not. She just seemed....really happy to hear his name.

“Of course!” Donald said.

“He helped us a while ago; he’s alright,” Goofy answered with a large smile.

“But where could he be?” Nala asked, dropping her excitement.

“We’ll look for him, he has to be here somewhere, right?” Sora replied. “I bet he’s probably waiting for us to visit.” Now Sora...don’t get too carried away.

“That's great! Please, let’s go get Simba, quickly!” Nala replied. Well...never mind. Carried away he did.

Rafiki nodded, "No time to waste, there must be a king for Pride Rock!" Everyone nodded in agreement, seeing Aseles could only agree and follow her group outside with Rafiki waving for their safe return.

Running past the dry terrain, Aseles hoped that this Simba was near indeed. This place was nothing but a dying world.

## Visions

The trek to find this Simba seemed endless, and Aseles's quench for thirst was starting to prick at the edge of her sanity. Honestly, she was limping her way through a desert, and unable to shake off that horrible sun mocking from above. She mustered all her energy to stay quiet, hoping it will to carry her on to follow the others. With no Heartless making much of appearances on the way, the trip seemed to take forever unfortunately as well.

"Can he be there?" Nala stopped as everyone perched their heads up, looking into the distance in front to see the beginning of a broad forest, filled with evergreen vegetation. Aseles's mind instantly connected that a sprout of water must be nearby.

Her ears pointed forward, "Water!" Aseles took immediate charge, feeling the hot prickling sensation on her tongue, needing to quench that undeniable sensation of relief. The others seemed to follow, but could not catch up to her quick speed. She crashed into the grassy floor, spitting the dirt out in heavy coughs, but made her way through a path of soft soil, hearing in the distance the crashing of heavy waves: a waterfall.

"Water!" she headed through the tall brush, skidding to a stop at the edge, slouching down as she dipped her long tongue into the haven of coolness, almost shuddering from the wonderful sensation. Aseles drank lustfully as her throat lurched, the sides of her mouth drooping in liquid as she sighed heavily, exhaling sharply. However, her eyes looked about, ultimately feeling that someone or something....was watching her.

Behind, the brushing noise crept as her eyes widened, noticing that she was still alone, the others nowhere in sight. She gulped the last water in her mouth, facing back to the shaking bushes, her ears dropping back.

"Guys?" The pair of sharpened eyes sent Aseles flailing back, but the roar that followed was so loud that it shook her bones, making her fall back onto the ground and cry out in fear. The giant lion hovering over roared in defense, his red mane about his head with his red eyes glaring down upon her. His teeth bared fully as his ears drew back on his head, with whiskers pulled straight. His pink nose flared as it huffed on the trembling lioness below him.

"Who are you?" he demanded profoundly, his eyes narrowing.

"I was just drinking water! I didn't know it was a crime!" Aseles answered stupidly, cowering her head and curling onto the soft grass. It bristled roughly against her as the lion neared closer, opening his jaws widely.

"Hey!" Aseles looked swiftly behind the lion, seeing Sora had approached with keyblade out, followed by a speedy Goofy and Donald.

"Who are all of you, friends of hers?" the lion spat, growling. Suddenly Nala had arrived, and this lion's expression seemed to change at the moment she arrived. His harsh demeanor dropped, his mane relaxing with his eyes basking in his view, "N-Nala?"

"Simba!" Nala yelled back, coming in front of him with a hearty leap, pushing the side of her cheek against his, "It's really you!" The lion named Simba blushed heavily, smiling a second later as Nala broke off her affection.

"Simba!" Sora, Donald and Goofy approached, standing beside Nala as Aseles took the chance to stand up, shaking her fur off.

"Do you remember us?" Sora questioned as he looked up at Simba, swishing his tail eagerly behind him. Donald landing on top of Sora's head with arms crossed as Goofy smiled the usual grin of his.

Simba looked over to him, tilting his head with his red mane following fluidly. Then his eyes widened in surprised, his jaws quirking up at the corners, "Hey! I do remember you. Sora, Donald, and Goofy! How could I ever forget about you guys?" Aseles exhaled deeply, straightening her stitched-up hair downward in the front, seeing Sora look over to her.

"Simba, this is our friend, Aseles," Sora smiled.

Simba turned to look at her, his expression more apologetic and tamed, "Oh, sorry about the surprise."

"Er....alright," Aseles stuttered, "No problem." Seriously...he was ready to chop her head off. Who knew lions were VERY territorial?

"Well, what are you guys doing here?" Simba asked, turning back to Nala and Sora.

"We're here for your help," Nala replied as she approached him, nodding once, "The Pride Lands, Simba. Scar is making everything impossible. You need to come back...as king."

Simba's face seemed to change in demeanor yet again, though this time his cheeks drooped and his gaze dropped, looking off to the side, "I can't." He sighed, turning around to face the small pond beside. Aseles tilted her head at him, then to Sora, Donald, Goofy and Nala who exchanged glances.

"Why not? You're the only one who can!" Sora argued.

Simba turned briefly to look at him, a frown upon his face, "I'm already used to being here. And....you guys wouldn't understand."

"Understand what?" Nala asked eagerly, taking a step forward.

"I learned...Akuna Matata," Simba sighed, shrugging one shoulder up.

"Huh?" Goofy questioned.

"It means no worries!" Behind Sora and the group, a meerkat pushed his way through some bushes, followed by a warthog trotting behind him. The meerkat crossed his arms, though the pig seemed to be quite nervous at the carnivores in sight.

"This is Timon and Pumba," Simba introduced, smiling at the arrival of his companions.

"Oh jeez, Pumba, we're going to be fresh buffet!" yelled the meerkat, gripping his head and shaking it in defeat, glancing at Nala, Sora and Aseles.

"We won't eat you," Sora reassured, chuckling gently as he sat down.

"These are some old friends of mine," Simba added, smiling as he followed suite. "This is Sora, Donald, Goofy, Aseles, and...Nala." His eyes glanced over to her, almost mesmerized. She looked back at him, blinking slowly. She couldn't seem to grasp fully that he was really there....as if he was some sort of...ghost.

"Right! We knew that!" Timon cleared his throat, walking toward Simba, "Name's Timon, and this is Pumba." Pumba, the warthog, followed close behind, making sure to sit on Simba's empty

side, a bit cautious of the arrivals.

"So, Akuna Matata means no worries?" Donald asked, looking quite in disbelief.

"You bet'cha!" Pumba answered, smiling largely.

"Simba..." Nala ventured forward, facing Simba directly face to face, "we need to talk alone."

Simba seemed nervous of her approach, but nodded slowly, looking over to Timon and Pumba, "I will...be right back."

"I'm sure whatever she has to say, she can say in front of us. Right?" Timon crossed his arms, raising an eyebrow at Nala.

Simba shook his head rapidly afterwards, standing, "We'll be back..." Simba looked back to Nala as she nodded, trotting toward the edge of a bush, pushing it to the side as Simba followed closely behind, looking back with a smile and then facing forward again. Timon seemed to be stunned on the spot as he saw them take off, Pumba patting his small hoof on Timon's shoulder.

"So.....no worries huh?" Sora grinned to Timon, raising an eyebrow.

MOMENTS LATER:

"Akuna!" Timon shouted, leading the way of the made conga line. Aseles watched them from the side, her chin resting on her prompted paw and her tongue licking around her lips to rid of any residue of the fruits she was eating.

"Matata!" Sora, Donald, Goofy and Pumba followed, swishing their rears to and fro in a dance.

"Akuna!"

"Matata!"

"Akuna!"

"Mata-" Timon halted as Sora bumped into the small meerkat, everyone looking ahead to see Simba was heading his way back through the thicket. He ignored everyone's presence as he headed toward the edge of the cliff at the far side, the river of the waterfall trickling behind him. By his hunched and frowned expression, something went awry with him and Nala.

"We'll be right back," Timon nodded to Pumba as the two headed toward Simba, Sora, Donald and Goofy waiting as Aseles stood up and sat on Donald's empty side, tilting her head at the trio.

"What do you think happened?" Donald asked.

"I'm guessing Simba isn't going back," Sora said, quirking his mouth to one side and scratching the back of his head.

"So he's going to have to be convinced?" Aseles asked, looking to the three.

"Yup," Goofy said, "Or how else is Scar going to be overthrown?" Pondering on the thought, if Simba wasn't going to do it, there wasn't much option to help the lionesses and Nala. They seemed to be stuck in a trap, with Scar's rule on both ends of the tunnel.

Aseles turned back up to see Timon and Pumba trotting their way back, shaking their heads lowly, "We tried. That kid is stick as stone."

"Then...it's our turn," Sora nodded as he stood, shaking his fur off. He looked toward Donald and Goofy who nodded to him to proceed. Sora faced Simba again and walked ahead, leaving Aseles with Timon and Pumba.

Aseles turned to them, "Well, what happened?"

"He says he can't go back," Pumba answered sadly.

"Why not?"

"He said it was too complicated," Timon whispered, shrugging with his furry arms crossed on his chest. Aseles slouched slightly, unsure how Sora and the others were going to be able to convince Simba to head back. Although, after a few minutes, Sora was walking his way back with Donald and Goofy, shaking his head as the rest looked to his direction.

"I couldn't convince him," Sora plopped down to sit, sighing.

"Hey, why don't you try?" Pumba perked his ears up, looking over to Aseles.

"What?" she raised an eyebrow.

"No, no, no! That has to be the stupidest idea," Timon stated, walking back and forth. Aseles glared at him, feeling slightly insulted. "Or maybe....why doesn't she go and convince him?" Timon said, pointing at her. Wait....Isn't that what Pumba just said....?

Aseles looked at the meerkat in disbelief, then toward Sora, Donald and Goofy who could only shrug at his comment. Behind, Timon began push her. "Work your magic kid!"

"Wait wait...what makes you think I'll be able to do something? I hardly know the guy!" Aseles interjected, shooting her eyes back at him.

"You're our last hope," Pumba replied. Aseles sighed at his blue face.

"Just give it a shot. It won't hurt," Goofy smiled, nodding once.

"....Fine. But I don't know what good it'll do," she said, heading her way toward Simba cautiously.

She approached him slowly, looking up to his slouched stature, his eyes looking down at the depth of the falls below him. Aseles followed his gaze, sitting down next to him, seeing the flower at the rocky ledge blowing in the wind. It seemed so serene here, compared to the deserted Pride Lands. Perhaps...leaving here was a big step for Simba, one that no one realized. However, why him? How did Nala know him? She stated before that he had died with his father...but...how? Simba seemed so tense in thought, his mane drooping along his face.

"Hey Simba, how's it going?" a dumb question, but what else could she possibly ask?

"Terrible," Simba answered with a huff. Okay...not a great start.

"How come?"

"Everything is a mess," he replied.

"But, you can fix it..." Aseles replied. His gaze dropped to her and she quickly shuddered at his saddened stare, "Or at least, that's what it seems like. Nala needs you..."

"I can't go back..." Simba looked away again, shaking his head. "It was my fault....why I'm

here.”

“I don’t...understand but...” she knew this was a bad idea.

“I had no problems here....Then, you all showed up,” Simba added almost coldly. She blinked at his sudden atmosphere, looking up to see his bright red hair gleaming in the sun’s rays. He seemed to be blaming himself for something, something haunting him, telling him to not go back. He seemed to have good intentions, but how could he show that if he wasn’t willing to defend his place?

"It’s not your fault. It never really was," she added softly, looking down below the rocky ledge.

"Yes it was." Okay, maybe that was the way to convince him.

She took a deep breath, “Why don’t you try?”

Simba looked at her, his eyes slightly narrowing, “Try what?”

She looked ahead this time, feeling the slight breeze envelope her being, “It’s important to try to make things right, and help your friends. There’s nothing to be afraid of...because your friends are here to help you.” Aseles looked toward the mist of the waterfall, falling into a trance of her words, “This might be slightly personal but...I really don’t have anything to fight for, to try to fix because...I have nothing left. *Don’t* let this Scar person take away what you have left, what is left of your home.”

Simba seemed dumbfounded on the spot, recollecting his words as he looked at Aseles, then ahead. She looked to his gaze, waiting for a sign, that sting of hope to spring in his eyes. However...nothing seemed to come. Aseles sighed as she dropped her head, feeling that she had failed in her mission to make something good. At least here...he wouldn’t worry-

Simba was suddenly on all fours, pushing his chest out as she looked up to him quickly, blinking. He looked down at her, nodding once, “Okay, let’s go.”

FFW:

Making it to the Savannah was much quicker, the adrenaline pulsing through her veins.

Simba seemed to be a natural born leader, guiding them all through the easy routes and quickest paths to reach the edge of the Pride Lands. The dust collected among the ground as the winds began to pick up, the clouds above groaning to life. Aseles shivered from the sudden change of atmosphere. In the distance, a hoard of hyenas were approaching as they all stood their ground, awaiting Simba’s orders. They all snickered as their ears were pointed and their tails straight up behind them. Timon and Pumba seemed to be the most jumpy.

"You guys go! We'll cover for you!" Sora swung his keyblade out as Donald, Goofy and Aseles followed suite, nodding to Simba, Nala, Timon and Pumba.

“Be careful!” Simba ordered as he began to lead the way forward, charging with Nala, Timon holding dearly to Pumba’s neck from behind. The ten hyenas lurched forward as Donald took the lead in front of Simba, throwing a roaring spell of Fire, stretching it across. The hyenas jumped back as Simba, Nala, and Pumba jumped past the lowest part of the flames, making their way to the distance of the Pride Lands. Sora, Donald, Goofy and Aseles faced the hyenas, her back to the destination. The hyenas snickered manically as the flames died down.

“Don’t let one pass you!” Sora ordered as he charged, swinging his keyblade as the hyenas dodged. Donald came next as he swung his wand, stretching out another line of Fira with Goofy



spinning his way across the ground, knocking hyenas down to their backs. Aseles leapt into the air, striking down the hyena that had lurched toward Donald. She landed on its front and swung her keyblade across, her teeth gritting as the hyena screeched in pain.

"I'll watch your back!" Aseles looked to Donald as he nodded back, casting another Fire spell. The two hyenas in front of her dodged and came forward. Aseles leaped, hitting them down and sending them hurtling back.

"Ah!" Donald yelled. Aseles looked back to see he had been knocked down onto the ground, a hyena snapping its jaws on top of him. Aseles jumped to his rescue, head-butting the hyena directly and sending him spiraling back. Donald quaked in fright as Aseles whirled around, seeing four hyenas approaching in a jump, tossing Aseles to and fro above of Donald. Their jaws snapped as Aseles winced in anger, slicing her keyblade from side to side, but didn't seem to land any hits. Again they lurched as she winced and shook, waving her keyblade back and forth as her legs spread over Donald protectively. The hyenas backed up as Aseles fell on one leg, groaning. Before they could advance again, Donald pointed his wand to the ground, a Blizzard spell taking effect among the sandy, dirt floor. The icy floor shined as the hyenas lost their footing, skidding across the floor around the two as Aseles stood up carefully, slowly digging her claws into the ice. Donald flew out as he landed on top of her back, taking his advantage to launch Fire spells to the skidding hyenas.

"Time to cool things down!" Aseles grinned as she pointed her keyblade forward; shooting the passing hyenas with Blizzard spells, freezing them on contact. They whimpered in their frozen state as Donald gripped the fur on Aseles's back, flying overhead and letting go of her at the edge of the made surface. She sighed as she looked over to see the hyenas in Sora and Goofy's side were all knocked out, Sora casually stepping over them.

"Everyone alright?" Goofy asked. Everyone nodded quickly and faced the direction where Simba had left. The group began to trek their way hurriedly toward Pride Rock.

The clouds began to take their thunderous toll as their lightning struck with vengeance, and their thunder rumbled in vain. The trickling of light rain began to hit Aseles's back as she advanced quicker, seeing that some sort of standoff was happening at the perch of the stone platform. Suddenly Simba was hanging for dear life, the thunder rippling across the sky and striking the floor below him.

The ghastly, red flames burst upward as Simba roared, trying to climb his way back up. The lionesses stood by the sides of the platform, staring widened as Nala stared in disbelief. Dead center was a lion with marooned fur, his black mane hanging deviously among his face, green eyes as bright as envy with a large scar across his face.

"Simba!" Sora halted from the barrier facing him with Donald and Goofy, Pumba and Timon in the very back, trying to push their way forward. Aseles managed to squeeze her way inside, shouting as she sprinted past the huddled hyenas and shooting her way to Scar with jaws open.

It all happened so quickly, but Aseles seemed to have lurched herself onto Scar's back, snaring her teeth into the back of his neck. He gasped and roared in pain as she clawed herself onto him, holding on for dear life. He reached back as the hyenas began to snarl their jaws at the approaching lionesses, watching intently as Aseles was thrown forward, falling before Simba's hanging paws. Aseles gasped as she looked up, seeing Scar leap, growling loudly. Aseles curled up in an instant, but overhead Simba jumped, pounding his paws onto Scar, and pinning him onto the ground before Aseles.

Simba pressed his paw at Scar's throat, "Tell them the truth!" Aseles stood hurriedly, seeing the hyenas beginning to approach. Simba yelled again, "Tell them the truth, Uncle Scar!" Aseles's

eyes widened, the flames shooting upward behind her.

"I killed Mufasa!" Scar bellowed.

Everything went to ultimate chaos.

The lionesses' snarled in rage as Sora and the others tried to push their way across, but failed as the hyenas lurched themselves forward, throwing Simba off of Scar. The lionesses made their way to defend Simba, slicing their powerful paws forward to help him stand.

Aseles dashed her way across, flashing out her keyblade and throwing any hyenas in her way, the shadows monstrous and large on the rock walls. She was suddenly thrown off her feet, falling on her stomach as the raindrops fell harder, the hyenas pouncing their way on top of her. Aseles shouted as Sora, Donald and Goofy made their way, throwing the menacing hyenas off of her in time before they could do any damage.

"C'mon!" Sora advised as Aseles began to help the lionesses regroup and push the hyenas off the large monument. The majority began to lose the battle as they shot their way back down the cliffs, running into the Savannah in defeat. The rain dropped dramatically as the fire sparked upward in deadly flames, taking the whole Savannah with it. Aseles's eyes shot around, finding that Simba and Scar were nowhere to be found.

"Where's Simba?" Nala cried out.

"Look! Up there!" Timon and Pumba shouted as everyone shot their eyes up, seeing that the top of the peak, the shadows of two lions fighting and thrashing against each other sparked against the thunderous clouds above them.

"Let's hurry!" Sora led the way within the cave at the far end as Donald, Goofy and Aseles made their way behind him, climbing up through the rocky formation of stairs. Aseles pushed the bundled rocks against her pulsing paws as Sora lunged himself upward, Donald taking the lead as he flapped his wings hurriedly for the rest to follow. He gripped the edge of Goofy's shell and began to drag him upward, Sora and Aseles staying close behind to stay in close range. Finally at the top, the winds were treacherous and loud as everyone turned to see Simba on the floor, panting heavily as he staggered on his feet. Scar stood steadily, his mane distraught.

Scar took the moment to charge as Sora zipped past the others and underneath Simba, head-butting Scar right on the head. He jumped back as he groaned.

"Sora!" Simba grunted, falling to his knees as Donald, Goofy and Aseles hurried to his side.

"Simba!" Donald pulled out his wand, ready to conjure a spell.

"You!" Aseles shot her direction around, crying out as Scar had toppled her down to the ground, his claws striking at her side. Aseles spread her feet as she pushed herself off from under him, feeling the excruciating pain constrict. Scar came again; throwing his paw forward as she fell back, skidding across the rocky surface. Aseles hurried to her feet, slipping on her back foot to see she was now at the very edge of the cliff. The fall was nothing but a nightmare as she turned again, eyes widening to see Scar charging. Suddenly Goofy spun into action, literally, as he sent Scar to the side, Simba taking the moment to his advantage and charging.

"Aseles!" Sora and Donald yelled out, heading to her aid.

"Not now, help Simba!" Aseles shook her head. They stopped as they quickly nodded, Goofy quickly heading to Aseles instead. "Nice aim, Goofy," Aseles began to stand at her feet, feeling excruciating pain all of a sudden. Ow.

"Here Aseles, this'll make you feel better," Goofy pulled out a potion and handed it to her. Aseles quickly bit off the top of the potion, drinking the green soothing liquid. Within seconds, the bleeding stopped and the cuts started to heal, the bottle dispersing from view.

"Thanks Goof, but now we got to help," she said. Goofy and Aseles both turned to see Scar attacking Simba, Sora and Donald, and seemed to be gaining the upper hand with violent claw-swings and slashes. How much energy could this lion possibly have?

With tempers flaring, Goofy and Aseles regrouped and began to counter fight against Scar's attacks, but again, it only seemed to pause at impasses to defeat him. After fighting for several moments, the group fended off and stood in an arch, Scar slowly creeping from in front.

"How intriguing. Your friends are here to help, Simba. I thought I told you to run away and to never return," Scar mocked.

"That was before I knew what you were doing to this place. And to my mother," Simba answered angrily.

"So you rely on your friends to help you?" Scar asked.

Simba was happy to answer, "Yes I do. Too bad you don't have any." Scar's grin disappeared. Oh crud, this wasn't going to be pretty..

Scar abruptly charged as everyone stood their ground. What Aseles had not anticipated was the kick of dirt along their faces. Aseles seethed and flung her face away, rubbing off the dirt. There was a roar, a body rolling, and finally Aseles was able to turn and see, eyes widening to see Sora had been pushed to the edge of the rocky platform, clinging onto it for life.

"Sora!" the group shouted.

Scar turned around, facing the four as Sora gritted his fangs, trying to pull himself up, "It seems your little friend is stuck."

"Scar!" Sora shouted as he flung forward, sinking his claws into Scar's hind legs. The male lion gasped in pain as he was suddenly being pulled back. The rest quickly leapt forward, but miraculously Sora jumped upward, clinging his claws into Scar's back as the lion began to slide back, unable to pull himself up. Sora jumped as Simba hurried forward, catching him by the paw as he dangled.

"Easy!" Simba tugged as Sora was pulled onto his feet, slumping down and breathing deeply.

"That was too clo--"

"Sora!" Donald and Goofy hurried forward and slammed themselves onto Sora, laughing as Sora chuckled. The thunder roared as the rain poured all over the peak. Aseles shook her hair out, feeling quite relieved of the water.

"Guys! I'm okay!" Sora insisted, sitting up as his hair stayed flamboyant in the rain. Donald and Goofy nodded, smiling widely as Donald ruffled Sora's head.

"Let's get back down, and see how the others are doing," Simba replied as the rest looked to his way, seeing him lead down the rocky path as Donald and Goofy stuck by Sora's side, Aseles following behind them. Once inside, Simba headed out of the exit of the cavern.

The rain continued to pour down heavenly as Aseles stepped out, feeling warm. Approaching

Simba were the lionesses, two in particular: Nala and another aged one, probably his mother. Next the lionesses parted respectfully for Rafiki to enter. Coming behind him were Timon and Pumba, smiling.

Rafiki held his staff upright as he stopped beside Simba, inkling it toward the peak of the platform, the clouds roaring gray above, "It is time, Simba."

"Rafiki," Simba said, hugging Rafiki with a paw, burying his face slightly in content. Rafiki smiled back and parted ways, waiting beside Nala.

Simba turned to look at Timon and Pumba, "I owe you guys...thanks."

"Don't mention it buddy," Pumba answered, but Timon could only nod, his eyes watering.

"Thanks for coming, Sora, Donald, and Goofy," Simba said. They nodded, grinning widely, and Simba came to stand before Aseles, "And thank you, Aseles." She smiled, seeing him head over to his mother and Nala, rubbing his cheek against theirs. They soon parted ways as Simba began to walk his way up to the peak, holding his head upright as it approached it cautiously. Once there he hunched his head, and brought it up in a smooth curve, looking at the raining sky.

Simba jerked his mouth and opened it wide, letting a loud roar out, breaking the silence of the rain. The rain stopped as Simba roared again. The lionesses joined in, encouraging Simba's triumph. The clouds began to disperse as the clouds parted, hitting Simba with the first rays of the sun.

LATER:

After the huge battle at the top of the cliff, Sora was slouching in his chair, with his soft skin gleaming from the flickering control lights of the gummi ship. His arms slumped at the sides of the metal chair as his chest grew then descended.

"He must be very tired," Aseles replied, looking back over to her fiddling fingers in her lap.

"Everyone has their limit," Donald nodded as he steered the ship carefully through the galaxy.

"He's always tired, but he just goes for it," Goofy added.

"To stop the Heartless, and Organization XIII," Donald stated.

Aseles looked toward the sky, sighing softly at the sight. Despite not doing much, Aseles began to realize she was learning a lot about them. How they worried about Sora....it was probably something Aseles was waiting to experience herself.

Aseles slumped in her seat, and felt her eyes becoming heavy. However....

Aseles crumbled in her seat, groaning as the world began to spin on its own. Her eyes fluttered, knowing she could not part away from the agony slumbering her. Her hands shook as she then fell against her side in her chair with legs spread in front of her.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Wake up!"

*Aseles felt something sharp against her neck, feeling the dawning of fear possess her entire body, and the blood drain from her face. She opened her eyes, her vision as clear as a hawk's as she lifted her head up from the ground. Axel was sitting over her, his face hovering with a needle of one of his Chakrams sticking at the center of her throat. Aseles inhaled a sharp intake of air.*

*Axel's eyes glittered with amusement as she pushed her head back to the floor, Axel leaning his head back with his elbows resting on his knees, his right hand holding his weapon steady.*

*"Finally you're awake, took you a while," Axel replied with a slight smirk.*

*"....Really..." Aseles rolled her eyes.*

*Axel raised a brow, "...You know...this is where you squirm for your life...kick me maybe...spit in my face."*

*"Because you know...this is getting pretty old. You know, I've had one almost choke me, another almost break my wrist, and you...well...you're like a continuous visit. I should be used to this by now. I clearly don't know what you guys want."*

*"Wait....I'm not the only one visiting you?" Axel narrowed his eyes.*

*Aseles gave a perplexed look, "...No...why do you seem surprised?"*

*Axel suddenly retrieved his weapon back, standing up as Aseles sat up, looking to him, "Who else has been visiting you?"*

*"How should I know...I don't know their names...and their faces in hoods....doesn't really help me," Aseles replied, standing up, though she held a defensive pose, her hands in fists.*

*Axel's face became somewhat pale, quite unsure of its own expression now, "I was...not expecting that." His aqua eyes scanned Aseles face, his red scorching hair at its tip, "...Have you made your decision yet?"*

*"I thought you said you didn't know..." Aseles narrowed her eyes.*

*"Have you made your decision, yes or no?" Axel gritted his teeth to her.*

*Aseles shook her head slowly, "...No...I haven't."*

*"At this rate.....they're losing their patience then," Axel shook his head slowly, gripping onto his chin roughly.*

*"Axel....are you trying to help me?" Aseles raised an eyebrow. Her eyes widened as she stared at those glittering orbs, his face unmoving.*

*"You remind me of someone I once knew..." he answered.*

*"Who...?" she whispered.*

*"Listen...I-"*

*"Aseles, Aseles, wake up."*

*Aseles jolted, sitting up on the floor, sweat drenching her forehead. Her eyes shifted up, then to the side to see Goofy there, his hand behind her head, shaking it to woken her up.*

*"Aseles, you okay?" Goofy asked, concerned.*

*"...Y-Yeah...I'm okay," Aseles replied, nodding quickly as she sat up straighter. She looked past him to see Donald and Sora were asleep. She must've only woken up Goofy.*

*"Are you sure? It seemed you were having some sort of nightmare," Goofy blinked.*

Aseles nodded again, "It was just a nightmare. Hopefully it doesn't happen again." Goofy looked at her questionably, but he didn't pursue the matter any further and nodded. He seemed convinced at the moment...which relieved her.

Though....what was Axel planning?

MOMENTS LATER:

The group arrived at Hollow Bastion, and after Aseles's incident, she was more than eager to finally get out of her seat. Running down the ramp, the gummi ship flew off into the sky as the group looked at one another in reassurance to head to the house first.

Aseles raced to it, bursting in through the door to find that it had been left unlocked, but seeing as that no one else came in here, it didn't surprise her. She was the first to hit the bathroom with a shower, instantly feeling better after the whole event in her dream.

Still, it began to worry her on what it could possibly mean. What would happen if she told her group about these....visions? Probably...nothing good. Having dreams about meeting Organization XIII? Yeah, they would trust her completely afterwards. It was becoming unclear of what to do, or what was right to do. She had to ask someone...and the only person she could seem to trust at this point...was Leon.

After the shower Aseles placed her clothes back on, drying her hair off and setting the towel on the rack, heading out. She plopped onto the comfy bed as Sora, Donald and Goofy took their turns to freshen up. She laid there in complete silence, though it was refreshing to keep her thoughts to herself. Everything seemed to be going ballistic.

"Alright, we'll go greet Leon and the others while you two go buy some things?" Sora questioned, strapping on his belt as he walked out of the bathroom, looking to Donald.

"Sounds good," Donald nodded.

"Ready Aseles?" Sora asked. She sat up, nodding and climbed out of bed. Soon they were all out the door as sunset began to approach to its end. The four separated for the time being, Sora leading the way toward Merlin's Study. He knocked on it three times and opened the door for Aseles. She smiled him a thanks and went in, followed by Sora behind.

"Hey guys," Leon smiled, waving to their direction. Sora waved as she blinked to him. Yuffie was simply wandering around in the room, looking at Merlin's books and occasionally opening a few to inspect. Merlin was sitting in his chair on the platform, sipping his cup of tea with the room brightened with one of his Fire spells.

"Back already?" Merlin asked, coughing gently, "Though of course, it's nice to see you again, well."

"Nice to see you guys too, and it's only for the moment. Had to restock," Sora replied, "Where's everyone else?"

"They're at the Market Place," Yuffie replied, flipping through some pages, "You should've seen Leon convincing Cid to finally get out of that computer chair."

"So how's it going guys? Anything to report?" Leon crossed his arms, leaning against the wall with the computer at his right.

"No sign of the Organization," Sora answered, shrugging as he hurried to Cid's usual chair, placing his hands behind his head and he slightly spun in the seat.

Aseles felt her head cringed in a jolt as she grunted, slamming her hand against her forehead...a little too loud. She looked past it to see Leon avert his attention to her, along with Yuffie's shifty eyes and Merlin's eyebrow raised. Oh...great.

"Anything else?" Leon questioned.

"Uh...Heartless are everywhere...they're like roaches," Aseles replied, swallowing roughly. Her feet had a mind of their own as they began to make their way to the door, passing by Leon who stared.

"Hey, where are you going?" Sora asked, standing up.

"Nothing, fresh air," Aseles managed to say with a brief glance. She placed a hand on her forehead as the other pushed the door open. She closed the wooden door behind her, hearing silence as her body began to wander into the darkening night.

It all seemed like a blur, unsure where she was going, but the sound of water trickling hinted she was heading nowhere near the Market Place. The floor shifted as Aseles stumbled forward several times, feeling stone hitting the front of her toes. The air grew colder as she climbed the stairs, soon moaning into the empty Bailey. Again she stumbled, though this time; unfortunately she tripped, falling onto her side.

"Go.....away..." Aseles strained through her teeth, gripping her head and she felt something shaking her shoulder. However, the battle was lost and she fell into the slumber.

*The instant Aseles fell, her body shot up and whirled herself around, keyblade flashing and ready. Her hair fell to rest on top of her back, but her face calmed once she found herself alone...though it wasn't the white room...it was a navy-colored cave.*

*Its walls hid the sunlight from outside it seemed, with some streaks of the sun cut through the cracks of the rocks above. Behind, a whole area of sunlight was shown, warming the ground as Aseles pressed against the soil gently. What...was this place? It seemed unfamiliar.*

*Aseles inspected around the gloomy atmosphere of the place, lowering her keyblade and spotting the scribbled drawings along the rock walls. They didn't seem intricate...perhaps made from a child. Had someone been in here...?*

*At the end of the cave, there stood...a strange, arching wooden door, its surface gleaming with gold rims at the edges. There was no keyhole or knob...and simply standing near it felt...uneasy. However, something compelled her to go closer, tilting her head as Aseles inspected every inch of it, occasionally looking among the cave. Someone was watching....though she could not find the person doing so.*

*"It's a paupu fruit..."*

*Her eyes shot to her right, keyblade ready, but she stooped, looking at the drawing near the floor. Slowly, she looked at it as she kneeled, blinking. Aseles's fingers touched the carved wall of it, sliding down to reveal the picture of poorly drawn faces looking at one another, though it was distinguishable that one was a girl, and one was a boy. The boy seemed to be handing the girl something....shaped like a star.*

*"If two people share one, their hearts become intertwined, and they're be part of each other's life, no matter what..."*

*"Part of each other's lives...no matter what..." Aseles whispered. The air shifted and Aseles bolted to her feet, turning to see a figure standing right behind her. Her keyblade lifted, though the*

*swirling, blond hair stopped her from attacking. She stared at Roxas, his black cloak settled among his thin figure. His blue orbs blinked slowly at her, and his arm lifted, holding a star-shaped fruit. He said nothing.*

*“Roxas?” Aseles questioned. The air pressured and glowed around him, and then the figure switched to Sora. Aseles’s eyes widened, finding a red-head figure forming beside him. She felt her vision being pulled forward, more like tunnel as she found her body being thrown back. The air whipped and kicked her face, and she was then slammed forward a moment later with her feet burning from scrapping across the floor. Aseles grunted and lifted herself on all fours, with a pair of sandals hanging in front.*

*Aseles shot her eyes up to find a blond girl sitting in a white chair, her lap holding a sketch book as she colored, though it immediately stopped as she stood. She seemed startled of Aseles’s appearance, with her sketchbook falling out of her grasp as it cluttered to the ground, the new drawing facing Aseles. Aseles narrowed her eyes to it....seeing it was depicting a portrait of.....herself. The crayons fell from the girl’s fingers.*

*“Who are you?” Aseles stood up hurriedly, looking down at the drawing, and then back at her, “Why are you drawing me?”*

*“Namine,” she responded the first as she bent down to pick up the notebook, followed by her crayons. Her eyes leveled back up to Aseles and she seemed frozen, unable to move.*

*“...Why are you drawing me?” Aseles asked again. The girl merely stared, not knowing what to say. “ANSWER ME!” Aseles ordered. This vibe from her....it seemed....unpleasant and menacing.*

*“I was forced to do this to you,” she said, her teeth biting her lip.*

*“What do yo-“ Aseles froze, looking at the notebook, then to her again, “....You....you’re making the visions? How? No, WHO is making you do this to me? Why??”*

*“Organization XIII,” she nearly whispered in fear.*

*“Why?”*

*“Organization XIII ordered me to give you visions.” Before Aseles could ask, Namine started once more, a little more regrettably, “I don’t know why....please don’t ask me.”*

*“Isn’t there anyway to stop them?” Aseles questioned. It seemed she was already setup to be in their plans without even noticing. This wasn’t good news.*

*“There is one way,” Namine answered, but something in Aseles’s gut told her it wasn’t going to be a good one, “You have to give up the keyblade.” Yup, Aseles knew it.*

*Aseles held her head with a hand, looking at the ground in puzzlement...but then the realization began to kick in. If she gave it up....how would she fight? How would she help the others? The way she stated it...Namine didn’t seem in favor for her giving it up. What else could Organization XIII be planning if Aseles did?*

*“Is there ANY other way?” Aseles asked, somewhat fearful.*

*“There is another one,” she answered.*

*“What is it-“*

*“Come Aseles, wake up!” a small chirp cried out. Aseles’s eyes began to flutter wildly open as*



she picked her head, looking around. Something tugged at her shoulder, and she looked to see it was Jiminy Cricket hanging at the back sleeve of her shirt.

"Wait, how did you get here?" Aseles blinked.

"I decided to follow you after you left Merlin's Study, after you left in such a hurry. Everyone seemed to be worried," the cricket replied.

"Well-" Aseles stopped as she sat correctly, looking to her left to see Leon approaching from the entryway of the Bailey. His eyes had shifted in her direction as Aseles began to stumble on her feet, holding onto the wall for support.

"Aseles, why are you here?" Leon asked.

"...I need to tell you something..."

"What is it?" Leon asked, "What do you want to tell me?"

"It's about Organization XIII," Aseles replied. Leon blinked, and seemed to be waiting. Aseles gulped, "Well.....I've been getting....some headaches, and I think it's Organization XIII that's causing it."

"Jimmy, don't you say a word to anybody," Leon looked to the cricket.

"Of course," Jiminy nodded. "Would you like for me to leave you alone?"

"It's fine," Leon replied, standing in front with arms crossed. His eyes locked to Aseles, "Where would you like to start?"

Aseles fiddled with her feet for a bit, scratching her cheek, "Well, I have these...visions, about Organization XIII. They always seem to be.... I'm not sure what they want with me....but I know it's not good."

"What about the one you just had now?" Leon asked, listening cautiously. Aseles explained as best as she could, even though she doubted herself of what happened. Did....Axel have anything to do with this?

"She didn't tell me what to do to stop them, but gave an option for me to give up the keyblade."

"Isn't there another way?" Leon didn't seem of the fond of the idea either. Aseles didn't blame him.

"There wasn't enough time; the vision was interrupted."

"Hmm..." Leon held his chin in thought, and silence resumed for almost a few minutes until he seemed to recollect his thoughts. "The choice is all yours, Aseles. It's only happening to you...we have no input, except for your own interests."

"Oh...okay," Aseles disappointingly replied.

Leon nodded, "Let's head back. Cid and the others are already there. Cid said that Twilight Town is reopened, and has put some new engines on the ship."

Twilight Town.....seemed Aseles wouldn't be staying for long after all.

THE NEXT MORNING:

The blankets stirred and slid off as Aseles sat on her bed, rubbing her eyes. They traveled to the right to see the other three sleeping soundly underneath their covers, with Donald's arms sprawled across the bed, Goofy's nose bouncing from his snoring, and Sora's hands behind his head.

Aseles climbed off of the bed, nearly crawling as she entered the bathroom with the fresh clothes gripped from the stand. She closed the door as she showered quickly, yawning between hair washes. Once done, she stepped out and dried herself off fully, putting her clothes back on. With a quick brushing of her hair, she headed to the door, though slightly stumbled back, pink in the face.

Sora seemed to have woken up, but was still groggy that he didn't notice that the bathroom was occupied. The only piece of clothing on?...His boxers. Aseles stepped aside as his vision cleared, watching her slip past him.

"Oh, sorry," Sora apologized, scratching his head.

"It's okay," Aseles hurriedly replied as she headed out of the room, closing the door gently behind her. She pushed her feet down the stairs toward the kitchen, which seemed to be the main place. There sat Leon and Yuffie, eating some brunch.

"You're up early," Yuffie answered, finishing her cooked eggs.

"I wasn't the only one," Aseles said, her cheeks burning.

"He was naked huh?" Leon asked, laughing.

"....Almost," Aseles answered, pouring herself a bowl of cereal and milk. She was half done when she heard Sora coming down the steps, and by the look on Yuffie's face, she was about to spill something embarrassing.

There was a knock on the door as Leon stood up, going to get it. Yuffie's attention averted to the door as Aseles sighed, finding Sora sitting next to her. The door opened and in came a small boy, with his dark, brown hair standing on ends slightly on his head. His eyes traveled to Leon, with a package in his hands. He held it out to him.

"This is from my mom," he replied.

"Thanks. Is Jacqueline having any trouble?"

"No, not right now," the little boy replied, shaking his head. His eyes looked over to the table, smiling gently.

"This is Yuffie, Aseles, and Sora. His name is Stan," Leon replied.

"Hello, Stan," the three greeted.

"Hi...it's nice to meet you," Stan waved back. He said a few words to Leon as Leon nodded. The little boy was out the door, though Leon seemed to follow.

Yuffie grinned, looking to the side, "SO....how was this morning?" Aseles groaned, burying her face into a hand as Sora blinked, tilting his head in confusion.

## Twilight Town

FFW:

"So how did you guys end up in Twilight Town....exactly?"

"Okay...maybe telling you that we woke up at the basement of a mansion isn't really.....what you were expecting," Sora tilted his head.

The Train Station was somewhat large, with moving trams parking in and out of their corresponding metal tracks. The brick floor thudded below Aseles's feet as she climbed onto a platform, seeing Sora, Donald and Goofy walked down the ramp leading to the window doors below. Aseles quickly followed as she passed by the snoozing ticket booth, and proceeded to step out of the window door as Sora held it open for her.

Outside, the sun was warm and trickling, glittering the stone platform they stood on. Along was the ramp, and Aseles walked over, and gazed upon the huge town of Twilight Town. The rooftops shined magnificently at her eyes, with her hands clamping onto the edge as she peered over, seeing the houses running along below and curving. In the far distance, Aseles could make out the shore of a beach. Somehow looking at it...seemed familiar....

"The last place we saw the King was right there, too," Donald added as he padded a foot down at the center of the area. Aseles turned over, seeing Goofy looking at their surroundings with Sora as well who had crossed his arms.

"I'm sure he's doing fine," Goofy nodded energetically. Aseles sighed, exasperated of herself as she looked up toward the sky, blinding her face as she aimed her face at the sun with eyes closed. If only they knew....

"But if King Mickey was here...I wonder if Riku's okay," Sora sighed.

"So...what happened after you saw Mickey?" Aseles replied, tilting her head as she advanced to the group.

"King Mickey," Goofy corrected.

"He didn't say where he was going, he just left," Sora replied, scratching his head. "From there, we ran into Hayner, Pence, and Olette. Then we left for a train, but for some reason, I had a feeling we weren't going to meet them for some time at least."

"Oh....well it's happy to know that you guys will be seeing them again, right?" Aseles asked.

"Yeah," Sora smiled widely.

"So, how did you get to Hollow Bastion, Aseles? We've never asked ya," Goofy inquired.

Aseles looked over to him, though her glance fell to the ground, with her hands in her pockets, "Um....Leon and Cloud brought me from Traverse Town....but that's as far as I can remember."

"Wait...you don't remember anything else?" Sora furrowed his eyebrows.

Aseles looked to him, and shook her head, "...No...nothing else. When I woke up, they said they found me in an alleyway. They decided to bring me to Hollow Bastion, and then...I met you guys. It's....kinda weird now that I think about it..."

"Do you know what happened to your friends, family?" Sora asked. Aseles shook her head.

Goofy reassured once more, "We'll help you find them in no time." Aseles could only nod in response.

"We better get going, I think the others are still in their Hangout," Sora grinned widely.

"Not so fast, Sora!" Donald called out as he gave chase, Goofy and Aseles replied behind. She swung her arms at her sides, looking around the civilians running errands up and down the steep hill of brick, with several shops and houses open. She kept pace up with Goofy, but only tripped as he skidded to a halt, seeing the three had entered an alleyway cutting sharply to the right. Aseles hurried behind, and met the coolness of the shade as she walked now. She looked up and around at the hanging lines of spun yarn, a few clothes hanging to dry. Ahead was a small open area with a dimmed lamppost, where the group stood in front of a torn, velvet blanket at their right. It flicked gently in the slight breeze. Sora and Donald immediately headed inside as Goofy followed. Aseles blinked, and kept close behind; peering in once she raised her head from ducking.

Inside waiting and lounging around the pipes and a torn couch was a boy with dirty blond, wavy hair, dressed in camouflage clothes. Beside him stood a girl with brown hair, colored in orange as she smiled at the gang's arrival. At her other side was a boy, a bit wide in appearance, nonetheless energetic in his expression with his black hair slightly folding over a headband around his head.

"Hey, Sora," the one with the blond hair greeted, his eyes widening at their approach. He didn't seem to recognize Aseles once he looked to her, and he held a firm glance.

"Hey, Hayner!" Sora waved. You guessed Pence was the other guy and the girl was Olette.

"Hey guys!" the other boy called out, holding a blue-colored popsicle in his left hand.

"Hey, Sora, Donald, Goofy!" the girl joined Hayner, giggling, "It's very nice to see you again!"

"Who's your friend?" Hayner said, unreeling on his glance.

"Oh, this is Aseles, she's a friend of ours," Sora reached behind, pushing Aseles gently from her back. Aseles stumbled a bit, but she was now standing before the three, her face sweat dropping slightly from the intimidating glance of Hayner.

"Hayner, you're scaring her," the girl waved a hand dismissively to him, making Hayner take a step back. The girl looked to Aseles, and held out her hand, and Aseles took it fondly, "Hi, my name is Olette. This is Pence, and...yeah, this is Hayner. It's very nice to meet you," Olette smiled warmly.

Pence saluted with two fingers with his free hand, "Please to meet you."

Olette seemed to nudge Hayner at his ribs, and Hayner winced, but lifted a hand, "Hey..."

"Sorry...he's a little iffy with new people," Olette whispered, giving Aseles a wink. Aseles raised a brow, but accepted the statement, and took a step back to stand beside Goofy's empty side.

"Hey, Sora..." Pence started, his smile disappearing. His two friends looked over to him, and then their mood seemed to drop.

"What, what's wrong?" Sora started, blinking.

"You know Kairi, right?" Pence started. Sora, Donald, Goofy, and Aseles stared at him.

"Yeah! Why? Is she here?!" Sora asked excitedly. From their faces....this couldn't be good news.

"Well, she *was* here," Hayner said. Oh great...

"Where is she now?!" Sora asked anxiously.

"We...don't know for sure," Olette said, rubbing her arm timidly.

"What do you mean?" Sora asked again, looking around the hangout. "How was she here??"

"She was here, but she was taken by some guy....named Axel," Pence said, biting onto the stick left on his popsicle. Aseles froze, and she could feel her stomach flip grossly within her flesh. Axel...he took her. Aseles quickly darted her eyes to Sora, and she bit her tongue, seeing him only able to stare at Pence in bewilderment. What was...this Axel up to? What could he possibly want with Kairi? Better question...how were the two even able to meet each other in the first place? Knowing Axel in a way....he was up to something that was part of his own agenda.

"We just missed her....huh?" Sora asked, saddened as his eyes glanced up to the three.

"We tried to stop him, but we couldn't. Sorry, Sora," Hayner replied, arms hanging at his sides. "We guessed...she was important to you. She mentioned you..."

"Um...That's okay, we'll get him next time," Sora tried to say confidently, but it seemed to break at the last two words. Suddenly the shout of a yell echoed from the stairs leading down from the alleyway.

"At the Sandlot!" Hayner replied. Sora was the first to rush outside, followed by Hayner and then the rest. The blanket hit against Aseles's face harshly as she went flying down the hot steps. Once below, she appeared in a large area, with a few benches surrounding the middle with a few closed shops among the sides. Surrounding a trio on the ground were several Nobodies, the Dusks' swaying bodies approaching.

"Hey, over here!" Sora shouted as he hurried forward, keyblade swinging in hand. The Nobodies froze and turned, then swiftly began to swerve their way through the air toward Sora's way.

"Get them out of here!" Donald ordered Hayner, Pence and Olette, pointing to the three that were on the ground.

"On it!" Pence nodded as he hurried forward, along with his two friends. Sora struck his keyblade across, a Nobody suddenly gripping the head of his weapon. Aseles swung forward as her weapon hurled like a boomerang, knocking the enemy off and disappearing once it hit the floor. The keyblade retracted back as Goofy pulled out his shield, going in front as he blocked the sharp arm of the Dusk heading Aseles's way. Aseles swerved around and threw a Fire spell, aiming it at the Nobody heading behind Donald, turning it into dead pixels.

"In coming!" Donald shouted. Aseles's eyes turned back with Goofy and Sora, eyes widening as the large, hammer-blade coming down. They rolled in different directions, spreading among the area to face the five Nobodies, towering over a good ten feet each with the same weapon in hand. Their bulk arms and feet shook the ground with their heads tipped over lazily. This did not look good.

Aseles charged with Goofy, though he swiftly went forward with shield in front. He was unexpectedly knocked back like a baseball, spinning toward the concrete wall. Aseles's eyes widened as she stumbled back, making her back hit the ground. She stared up at the oncoming blade, dodge-rolling to the side. She swung her keyblade across, knocking the towering enemy

over.

It flipped forward onto the ground as Aseles came charging in, decapitating it and it flailed, until it stopped. It lay defeated and began to disappear. She then spun, swiftly holding her keyblade out as the oncoming blade pounded onto her weight recklessly, making her knees touch the ground as she grunted. The pounding hammer continued as she could feel the Fire spells rioting around the Nobody. It screeched as she winced, covering her ears as it stumbled back, then fell onto a second Nobody. The two lay in flames as Sora, Donald and Goofy came to Aseles's aid, Sora helping her stand.

"Two more!" he nodded. Aseles faced forward, jumping to the side to feel the ground tremor, the blade-hammers smacking where she once stood. Sora and her advanced to the Nobody on the right as Donald and Goofy rushed to the one on the left.

Sora's form instantly changed as he skidded across the ground, almost in the air as his clothes took a yellow appearance. A second keyblade appeared as one twirled in his left hand, the one on the right smacking against the enemy with deadly precision. Aseles aided him right behind as she lashed her keyblade against the legs of the large beast, the hammer following her closely as she continued to run around.

She faced the last blow and knocked her keyblade across, throwing the hammer out of balance and away from the Nobody's grasp. It stumbled as Sora launched from behind, striking both of his sharp keyblades forward, piercing the back of it and shooting out from the front. The Nobody began to disintegrate in the air as Sora landed, sighing heavily as he turned back to look at it completely gone.

He turned to look at Aseles, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," she replied, calling her keyblade away. Aseles turned to look at Donald and Goofy, seeing they were hurrying over.

"Is everyone alright?" Goofy asked. Everyone nodded.

"What were those things?" Hayner appeared on the scene once the coast was clear. Behind him were a rushing Pence and Olette.

"Nobodies," Sora answered. "They're part of the Organization XIII we're fighting. Axel is one of them."

"Nobodies? They were pretty creepy," Pence said, scratching his head as he looked around for clearance.

"Hey! What are you doing on our turf?!"

All of them turned to the exit at the left, seeing the trio that was once on the ground on their feet, the leader wearing a beanie on his head. The rest of his posse consisted of a girl with silver hair, and a boy of tall, buff stature, with a rough chin and orange shirt.

"What do you mean your turf?!" Hayner asked angrily, his hands into fists. "These guys just saved your sorry butt from being crushed."

"Seifer was caught off-guard, y'know!" the one with the muscular build defended. Sora stared deadpanned at them with Donald mumbling a "yeah, right" while tapping his foot. Goofy scratched his nose in confusion as Aseles simply smacked her forehead.

"Uh huh....suuure," Olette rolled her eyes.

"Who are you four? Never seen you here," the leader, named Seifer stepped forward, standing a few yards, though he continued to approach. His eyes fell on Sora as Hayner, Pence and Olette parted. Aseles had to admit; even she took a slight step back. The stare they shared wasn't so pleasant.

Seifer grinned slightly, stopping right in front of Sora with his fists on his hips, "Aren't you scared of me?" Seifer huffed practically on his face.

"I've faced more hideous stuff than you," Sora answered. Aseles's mouth dropped along with everyone else's as Olette stared in disbelief. Buuuuuurn.

"What did you say?" Seifer asked coldly, narrowing his eyes.

"You heard what I said," Sora answered back, a grin on his face. Sora....he was pushing it....really.

"You don't want any trouble from me."

"Is that so?" Sora retorted back. Seifer huffed one last time, and he began to walk away, throwing his coat behind him. He signaled the other two to follow as they began to walk out of view from the Sandlot. Hayner suddenly began to laugh, holding onto his stomach. Pence and Olette stared at him as Aseles rubbed her forehead with Donald and Goofy rolling their eyes.

"Really? You just stood up to Seifer!" Hayner replied, grabbing Sora's shoulder and shaking it a bit.

"He wasn't that scary..." Sora shrugged.

"You are our hero, no question," Pence chuckled.

"Way to go, Sora!" Olette clapped along with Goofy.

"Seriously though....Seifer is nothing but trouble," Hayner cleared his throat, nodding.

"So is Sora," Donald chuckled.

"Thanks, Donald....thanks."

"I say this calls for a reward!"

MOMENTS LATER:

The ledge over the bell tower was very intimidating at first, but once Aseles was sitting there for a couple of minutes, she swung her feet two and fro, her eyes looking among the whole square of the place. The trams moved along their tracks below in rhythm, her lips munching on her treat happily as she rested one elbow on a knee. Sitting at the end of the row, Aseles looked to Donald, Goofy and Sora, followed by Hayner, Olette and Pence on the other end.

"What flavor is this?" Sora asked, munching hesitantly on the treat, though seemed to grow onto its taste.

"It's sea-salt ice-cream. Weird combo...but pretty good," Hayner shrugged, munching.

"They always make the flavors in bundles, but no one ever seems to buy it. We sometimes get it for free," Olette added cheerfully.

“OH! I just remembered!” Pence called out, leaning over to stare at Hayner and Sora, “Today is the Struggle Tournament!”

“Oh, that’s right!” Hayner smiled widely, then looked over to Sora, “Wanna join it?”

“Struggle Tournament? Never heard of it,” Sora tilted his head.

“We’ll, you’ll see it if you sign up, what do you say?” Hayner smiled widely.

“Hmm....sure!” Sora smiled. His eyes suddenly averted to Aseles, “Hey, Aseles, you up for it?”

Aseles coughed slightly from her treat, clearing her throat at she looked over, “...Me?”

“The more the merrier,” Pence nodded quickly.

“Two challenges? I’ll still wi- AHH, brain freeze!” Hayner slammed his hand against his forehead, seething.

“Haha, we’ll see,” Sora grinned. A tournament eh? It would be a good distraction nonetheless.

“No doubt, Seifer will join it too,” Hayner grumbled, rolling his eyes.

“Then hey, this is the perfect chance to show him who’s boss,” Sora insisted.

“Hmm....true, very true,” Hayner nodded smugly.

“Then let’s hurry. The Tournament starts in a couple of minutes!” Olette replied, turning as she pointed to the large clock behind her.

“Don’t hold back, Sora,” Hayner grinned.

“Never will,” Sora replied, smirking.

**BACK AT THE SANDLOT:**

Upon arrival the whole area was in frenzy, with the crowd large and almost stomping at the ground. Several balloons hung around the area with a few shooting strings filling the air. A platform was added in the middle of the field with an announcer walking among it, seeming to get the crowd pumping for the event to begin.

Pence headed forward, then pointed to a stand that was at the left, with a line of few contenders already leaving, “Better sign up guys! I think they’re about to close the entry.”

"Come on!" Sora suddenly gripped Aseles’s hand as she shrieked in surprise, being tugged along with Hayner chuckling behind. She peeked over Sora’s shoulder, seeing him write his name in neatly. She followed behind, mostly scribbling her name down as Hayner was last to follow. Sora looked over to the platform, almost bouncing in excitement as she looked to Hayner, slightly grinning.

“See? You created a child,” she pointed out.

“He better step up his game then,” Hayner grinned, leading the way back to the others who were able to grab a bench to stand on. Once arriving though, the microphone whirled and the announcer took heavy strides to stand in the middle.

**"Ladies and Gentlemen, the Struggle Competition has begun! The winner gets the**



**Champion Trophy, and is able to compete against the standing champion, Setzer** (just the mention of the name, girls screamed). **Ladies first! It's Fuu vs...Aseles!"** Aseles blinked, instantly being pushed forward through the crowd by Hayner. She flailed slightly in confusion, but stood by the platform as she was then hoisted up from behind from the vicious crowd. The announcer stepped forward, and handed her a blue-colored club with a golden-colored handle. She held it up curiously, looking past it to see her contender...was the girl from Seifer's posse. Oh...well this was just great.

Her silver hair brushed past half of her face as she gripped her own club, standing formidably in front a yard away. Aseles stepped forward to face her correctly in the center, and looked at the announcer in question.

"Umm...we hit each other...with this?" she asked.

The announcer blinked, "You're not from around here, are you?"

She blushed, "Er....no. Not really."

"The rules are simple: knock out the opponent first, or forfeit. Got it?" the announcer replied. Before she could answer he lifted an arm up, blowing a loud whistle. She cringed from the sudden noise. **"Let the fight...begin!"**

The announcer quickly dispersed from the scene as Aseles looked to Fuu who took a step back. Aseles blinked again, holding the blue club steady, but charged anyways. Fuu ran to the side and swung across. Suddenly Aseles underestimated her blow and stumbled back, holding the club defensively in front. Her feet teetered on the edge of the platform as the crowd shouted. Her back arched as she threw herself forward, back on balance, only to face a charging Fuu.

Aseles dodged to the side, rolling and quick on her feet again as Fuu was quick and sharp on her attacks. Aseles grunted and swung upward, sending Fuu into the air abruptly. She recovered somewhat and charged once more, but Aseles was ready. Aseles deflected her club around to her right, her left hand released from the weapon's grip. Aseles swung forward directly as Fuu stumbled back, falling to the ground. She seemed....unmovable.

"Aseles is the winner!" Cheers erupted as Seifer and his other right-hand man approached on the platform, helping their companion up. Aseles blinked as she headed to the announcer, handing him the club as he took it, congratulating her with a smile. Well...that was easy.

Aseles hopped off the platform, and she was instantly greeted with pats on the back, with one hand ruffling her hair. She smiled softly as she headed to the others as they hopped down from the bench, Olette the first to greet Aseles with a hug.

"That was great!" she replied, clapping as she let go.

"Well you're a natural for it," Hayner smirked, putting a hand on her shoulder. Aseles looked to Donald and Goofy who applauded her victory, Sora smiling widely. Guess signing up wasn't a bad idea after all.

A few matches continued afterward; the second match was Seifer's right-hand man, Rai versus Hayner, but Hayner took the victory bolding with a forward attack. The third was followed by Sora and someone named Vivi, though Sora won it by a landslide. Unexpectedly called next was Seifer against someone unknown in the crowd. Sadly, the jerk won without breaking a sweat. The announcer took the opportunity to call a recess.

"I'm so pumped!" Hayner grinned, "The Second Rounds are about to be announced.

"If this is what training is, I would train every minute!" Sora placed his hands behind his head, swaying his head from side to side. Aseles smirked as her eyes traveled across the Sandlot, but unmistakably met Seifer's orbs as he began to approach. He glared at her presence as Aseles held her ground.

"What's wrong, Aseles?" Donald asked, but his face lifted up at her view, seeing Seifer.

"Hey, pipsqueaks!" Seifer began as the others turned to face him. Fuu had woken up from her knockout as Rai held tight fists at his sides.

"What do you want now?" Pence asked, exasperated.

"You three don't stand a chance," Seifer said, placing his hands on his hips.

"Definitely," Fuu replied.

"Seifer is in his zone, y'know!" Rai added.

"We'll see," Hayner crossed his arms tightly and narrowed his eyes.

"See ya, losers," Seifer grinned, walking away as the two followed. Well, this just got personal indeed.

MOMENTS LATER:

**"Now we will continue the Struggle Match!"** the announcer began as the crowd silenced. **"For the finals, it's our own boy, Seifer! Then it's the guy with an attitude, Hayner! Next is our mysterious guy, Sora! Last is the determined Aseles! Who will win the competition?! Up next is Sora vs...Hayner!"**

"We'll be rooting for you!" Olette shouted out as Sora and Hayner hurried forward side by side as the crowd parted ways. Once they reached the platform, they turned to give a thumbs up, and proceeded to get their clubs from the announcer. The two friends then faced each other, the head of their clubs making contact with their faces stern. Aseles's eyes blinked as the air somewhat shifted, but shook the wavering out to fully submit herself in the fight.

**"Begin to....STURGGLE!"** the promoter shouted and fled the scene as the crowd burst in cheers and whistle. Aseles's eyes traveled to their wavering clubs, Sora taking the offensive as Hayner took the defensive, blocking Sora's oncoming swings.

Sora was quick and precise on his strikes, Aseles's eyes slightly widening from how fast he was moving; Hayner seemed to struggle to keep up with his blocking. Abruptly Hayner got a strike and sent Sora skidding across the ground, but Sora was quick to recover that sent the whole wave of hands jeering for more. The combat joust was reaching its end fairly quick as Hayner swung forward again and again, but it was no match for Sora's counters. Sora swung horizontally in a semi-circle and struck from below, knocking Hayner into the air. Hayner's club went out of hand and flew past and over Sora's head. Hayner's feet and hands swung forward as his back was pulled behind him, making him hit the ground.

**"Sora is the winner!"** the promoter declared as he stepped onto the platform. The air was in complete frolic as Sora helped Hayner up; patting his back as Hayner winced, chuckling lowly. The two walked jumped down from the platform and proceeded to head over to the group.

"...Ehhh...I went easy on you," Hayner replied, holding onto his right shoulder and rotating his arm gently beside him.

Sora chuckled, "Of course."

"Wait, if you two went against each other--"

**"Up next! Aseles vs...Seifer!"** Pence was interrupted as the crowd burst in jubilation, making Aseles jump in fright really. Oh...right...Seifer.

"You better beat him!" Hayner encouraged as he gripped her shoulder, shaking it as Olette sweat dropped, prying her hands off of her. Aseles stared at him nervously as she then parted way toward the platform. She slowly gulped and she could only look at it, blinking as she reached the edge of it.

"C'mon Aseles....show him what you got!" Sora reassured from behind. Aseles slightly flushed, but nodded with arms hoisting herself onto the platform as Seifer hoisted himself up from the opposite side. Aseles gulped again as Seifer proceeded forward, boastful in his walk as he stood on one side of the promoter. Aseles hurried to the other, clearing her throat as she stared at Seifer.

"Keep it clean," the promoter whispered, giving both the blue clubs and he left the platform, the crowd still cheering. Him not announcing it while she was still on there didn't seem like a good sign really...

"I expect you won't keep it clean," Seifer smirked.

"Doesn't matter either way, because I'm going to win," Aseles huffed, narrowing her eyes as she took a ready distance with legs spread for balance.

"Come on, Aseles!" Aseles heard Sora yell from the cheering crowd.

**"THROW HIM TO THE GROUND!!!"** Hayner shouted loudly above everyone else.

**"SHUSH!"** Pence pulled Hayner back down.

"Just do your best!" Olette called out nervously. Aseles sweat dropped again, staring deadpanned at their direction, but she quickly shook it off, staring at Seifer who pointed his weapon at her, wavering it in taunting pace.

"Trust me, I won't lose to you!"

"We'll see about that...." Aseles gritted her teeth.

"Have it your way then!" Seifer exclaimed.

**"LET THE STRUGGLE...BEGIN!"** the promoter shouted from the end of the stand, and it took a second for Aseles to realize that Seifer had charged right at the end of the sentence.

She placed her weapon in front, her feet sliding a few yards away from the powerful swing. Seifer charged again with full force, though Aseles was quick enough to dodge and spin while crouching. Her hit slapped against Seifer's slightly exposed abdomen as he stumbled back, grunting. Seifer charged once more and leapt into the air, spinning almost in slow-motion, and Aseles could only wonder how he did i- BAM.

Aseles was knocked onto the ground, rolling as she reached the edge. She grunted as she began to stand, feeling the rallying bodies of the crowd at her right. She kneeled up and stood up, rubbing her shoulder, though she had no time to recover as her eyes shot to the left, seeing Seifer coming.

Aseles rolled forward, his bat missing the top of her head. She stumbled forward, striking her bat back as she blocked the oncoming blow. However, she had not anticipated the swinging club from behind, smacking her back. She rolled forward, skidding on her legs and falling to the side. She grunted and gritted her teeth, standing up as Seifer came again....but she had no intention of letting him gain the upper hand.

"You don't stand a chance!" Seifer yelled out as he swung downward. Aseles swung her bat against his, countering forcefully as Seifer's smug look began to drain from his face as she advanced, and gained ground.

"Go, Aseles!" Olette and Donald shouted as the crowd began to chant and stomp in excitement.

Aseles gritted her teeth harder as she batted his weapon away from his defensive stance, and struck him multiple times in succession. He grunted and pushed his body forward. Aseles stumbled back from the sudden action, but pounced forward with bat swinging. Seifer froze on the spot and was suddenly thrown back, his head hanging from the edge of the platform with his arms hanging like loose branches on a dying tree. His eyes rolled in his sockets as his bat lay in front of her feet. Aseles grinned as she placed her bat over her shoulder, holding it with both hands.

**"Aseles is the winner!"** The crowd roared with cheers as Aseles laughed lightly, handing the bats to the promoter as he appeared. He hurried to help up Seifer with his posse. Aseles jumped off the platform and was greeted with pats once more, a few nudges, and was lunged in a hug by Olette.

"You did it!" Olette said excitedly, grabbing her hands and jumping slightly in place.

"Of course she did!" Donald said, crossing his arms as Goofy gave her a thumbs up.

"And why would she lose to Seifer?" Hayner said, waving a hand, "Like any of us would!"

"Exactly, she would never lose to that guy!" Sora said, placing a hand on her shoulder, giving it a firm squeeze.

"But uh, if she beat Seifer, isn't she going against you?" Goofy answered. Aseles's eyes shot to Sora as he looked back, blinking.....WELL.....CRAP.

"Well, you up for it, Aseles?" Sora grinned widely. No. No, no....not really.

"I...guess so," she scratched her cheek. It was always a thought...who would win?

"You're not afraid of a little competition, are you?" Sora said his hands behind his head.

"Of course not! You have no idea who you're dealing with," Aseles crossed her arms, huffing again. Yeah....this should end smoothly.

MOMENTS LATER:

**"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE STRUGGLE MATCH IS ABOUT TO BEGIN!"** the promoter shouted. The people of the town started to rush in near the platform with Hayner and the rest of the gang gaining front seats. Aseles stood on the platform, facing Sora a yard away with bats given by the promoter.

Maybe.....fighting Sora wasn't as hard as she thought it w- Ah who was she kidding?! She was either going to get creamed or try to win and fail.

"Alright, this is it! Have fun you two!" the promoter whispered to them. He then left the platform as the cheers and yells headed to maximum; definitely making Aseles's sensitive eardrums rattle

and shake. **"Whoever wins this match will have bragging right for a year! Plus, the winner will have a chance to fight out undefeated champiiiiioooooon.....SETZER!"**

"Don't hold back," Sora grinned. Aseles's butterflies hooves kicked into high gear. Oh....crap.

**"STRUGGLE!"** Sora struck forward without hesitation as Aseles jumped into the air, jumping back and escaping his swing. She landed on her feet as she found Sora charging, though she obliged to his attack, charging as well.

Sora leapt and struck from on top, Aseles's bat coming into view as she blocked with shaking arms. Sora jumped back and rushed once more, the wind blowing his hair back as he grinned, making the bats contact one another with a loud slap.

"Er...you wouldn't hit a girl, would you?" Aseles replied nervously, holding her ground.

"Is someone backing out?" Sora smirked.

Aseles huffed, pushing forward and making Sora's feet slide, "...No way." She swung Sora's bat upward, leaving him open. She bashed her bat against him as he stumbled back, though was quick to recover and smack the weapons against each other once more, making Aseles's arms shake from the huge amount of tension he was releasing.

The crowd's eyes could simply not keep up with who was delivering blows first, especially with the fact that Aseles was occasionally jumping around to confuse Sora; however, Sora managed to keep up, and Aseles could only guess all that training with the keyblade was working wonders for him. He grinned.

"Don't get so arrogant!" Aseles gritted her teeth and charged, swiftly spinning the bat and changing it between her hands, though the left hand seemed more uncontrollable to possess. Still, it seemed to push Sora back as the attacks increased, the air tensing and sparking in upmost fiery determination. Finally, she was able to smack the bat out of hand as it flew upward to the sky. Sora dodged in place as she continued to swing at him, but simply found him too quick to hit. She grunted and swung her leg forward, Sora's heels caught as he stumbled back. He hit the ground with a grunt, his eyes shooting up as Aseles's bat came into view in front of his face.

Astonishingly the bat seemed to appear the moment she hit, and she was suddenly thrown back, flying back and hitting the ground with a single plop. She groaned and swiftly stood, rubbing her lower back as she shot her head up to him....but with eyes widening.

**"Seems like Sora has taken the fighting to another level!"** Sora's clothes had changed to a slivery white. Great. Perfect.

"Alright, if you want it that way..." Aseles's eyes trembled and averted to a sharp shade of red, her hair flying around her head as they slightly stood at their tips, curving outward. Sora blinked slowly at the transformation, but kept his confident posture. Not the best place to do it...but Aseles was becoming determined on winning.

**"Aseles is complying to make things interesting!"** Oh yeah. Better believe it.

The cheers were at an uproar as Sora swiftly charged as Aseles followed, only visible for a few seconds as both then began to carelessly clang and strike one another with such force that the air screamed.

"Is that all you got?" Sora asked as Aseles found herself in front of his face, both of their weapons clashed together in the form of an "X". She gritted her teeth and proceeded to clash weapons as

the air spun among both of her feet. The winds picked up from the crushing energies, the crowd slightly ducking their heads but unable to move their eyes from the battle scene. Aseles shouted as Sora copied, though the winds began to go against her favor, shooting her hair back.

“N-No!” Aseles shouted as she lunged forward, but found her bat dismissed, hitting the air. Her eyes widened, but shut closed as she found herself falling through the air, legs flying in front of her. She hit the ground as the crowd fell dead silent. She grunted weakly and began to kneel, making herself stand with the bat used as a cane. She looked up, finding Sora still glued to his spot, chest heaving.

Aseles winced as charged forward, swinging. Sora blocked, then spun in place and swung from the opposite direction from his powerful spin on his heel. Aseles flew to the side, rolling to a stop as she faced the sky....eyes rolling in defeat. Her Red State vanished as her hair fell down on her face.

**"SORA IS THE WINNER!"** The crowd cheered in ultimate victory as Sora hurried over, kneeling before her and patting her cheek.

“Aseles?? Hey, can you hear me?!” Sora blinked worriedly, helping her onto her wobbling feet.

“Uh.....wait....who won?” Aseles mumbled incoherently, stumbling as her arm was hooked around Sora’s shoulders.

“Let’s give her a round of applause!!” The crowd’s claps echoed in her ears as she found someone else coming to her aid, feeling it with either Hayner or Goofy.

"You put up a good fight," Sora replied with a soft smile, Aseles being carried off of the platform. She felt her bottom rest onto the ground and the back of her head resting against the brick wall.

"You did well."

Aseles’s eyes flickered, wincing from the bright light of the sun on her face. She looked past the worried Olette and reassuring Pence and Goofy to see a man in the distance of the stairs leading to the alleyway. He seemed....all she could make out were red robes.... The man was so far away...but how was it possible she could hear him from all the way over there?

“...W-Wait...” Aseles mumbled, trying to stand, but found herself being pushed back down to rest. She blinked two more times...and the man was gone.

"Here," Donald’s appearance came into view in front as Aseles blinked to him, the world somewhat spinning. She held onto the potion as best as she could, the cork already off as she sipped the green liquid. Her vision cleared almost instantly, and she stood up, looking past everyone to look at the end of the stairs. Her eyes ducked around the crowd....but the man was spotted nowhere.

“What are you looking for?” Pence asked, blinking.

“Uh....the match is already starting?” Aseles questioned, looking to Sora and the man proclaimed as Setzer. Aseles looked to Donald, “Oh, and thanks.” The duck nodded, and then turned to look at Sora and Setzer.

**“Time to....STRUGGLE!”**

“Ahh, Sora is going to win for sure,” Donald replied, smiling widely.

“But...wait.....how do-“ The crowd fell on dead silence as she picked up her head to look, seeing

the man named Setzer....was on the ground, unmoving. Sora blinked in confusion looking at his bat, then at the man he had just knocked out with one blow. That literally took less than three seconds.

### **“SORA IS THE WINNER OF THE STRUGGLE TOURNAMENT!”**

Donald looked to Aseles as she crossed her arms, mumbling, “...Don’t....say...anything.” Donald chuckled as Sora was suddenly bombarded with the whole crowd, a large, wine-like carved trophy on a golden plate shining in his grasp. He held it up as Hayner and the group cheered in excitement as Aseles merely clapped, rolling her eyes. She knew she were no match for Sora.

After a few moments of glorifying his win, Sora came back with trophy in hand.

"I knew you would win!" Hayner flicked the side of his nose with his numb, fists on his hips as he stared at the trophy.

"I wouldn't want to disappoint," Sora grinned, pointing to the golden belt that hung loosely around his hips. He placed the trophy down as Hayner suddenly held his chin, staring at it curiously.

“What is it, Hayner?” Olette asked.

“....I don't know...but this seems...familiar...don't you think?” Hayner questioned, looking to Pence and Olette. The two looked at one another, then back to Hayner, merely confused. “Well, never mind, I must be still hallucinating from the whack Sora gave me.”

“Huh?” Sora stumbled a bit in place as his keyblade appeared in place, blowing his hair back delicately as the weapon began to tremble. The rest stared at it as Sora called it off, looking to the trio of the world, “Well...it looks like we gotta go.”

“So soon?” Olette questioned.

“Yeah....it seems important,” Sora nodded, looking to Donald, Goofy and Aseles.

“Ah, alright,” Donald nodded. Sora smiled, and then lifted the trophy up, handing it to Hayner. Hayner blinked at his gesture, holding his hands up in question, but Sora proceeded to push it into his grasp.

Hayner held onto it tightly as he looked at it in wonderment, then up at Sora along with Pence and Olette, “What's this? I didn't win it.”

“I want you to have it,” Sora smiled, unbuckling the belt and hanging it around the top of the trophy. Hayner blinked, though Sora continued, “Plus...I think you would take care of it much better than I would.”

“Well.....jeez, thanks Sora!” Hayner replied, smiling widely.

“That is awful nice of you....we'll take good care of it!” Pence smiled widely.

Sora turned to look at the three, tilting his head, “Ready to go?”

“Yup!” Donald, Goofy and Aseles nodded.

“Be back soon....it was...really fun today,” Hayner scoffed to himself.

“Will do. You're our friends,” Sora replied, holding his forearm up toward Hayner. Hayner placed

the trophy down, grinning as he connected his upright forearm and connecting it with Sora's as well, slightly tapping the back of their fists together.

“Right, friends,” Hayner replied.



## Battle for Hollow Bastion

FFW:

The arrival to Hollow Bastion was quick, but the moment Aseles stepped foot into the Market Place...she was instantly touched with something....dark...hiding amongst the shadows of the place. Every crevice seemed to be an enemy, with eyes watching intently as she stepped forward. Aseles's eyes scanned to see the lot was completely empty, with none of the shops open. It seemed....like this place was abandoned.

"Where is everyone?" Sora questioned blinking as his blue eyes scanned the place.

"Something just doesn't feel quite right," Goofy replied, placing his hand against his chin worriedly.

"Look!" Donald shouted as everyone's eyes shot forward. A bundle of soldier Heartless ducked right by, disappearing in black orbs as they were followed by Nobodies. The Dusks hovered among the spot, but then continued onward off to the right, disappearing out of sight.

"Well...that doesn't look good," Aseles added.

"C'mon...we should check out where everyone else is," Sora nodded, looking to the rest. He hurried to lead the way as the three stuck behind as usual, though up on approaching the top of the stairs to lead up to the highpoint of the Market, was Cloud resting his back against the closed, ice-cream shop in the left.

"Hey, Cloud!" Sora replied, hurrying to stand a few feet from him. Cloud's eyes lifted, looking to him, and then traveled amongst the trio to end up at Aseles. He blinked slowly, and then turned away, his arms crossed.

"Hey," Cloud replied merely.

"Whatcha doing Cloud? You seem...sorta different," Donald replied, raising an eyebrow.

"If I look different...it's his fault," Cloud retorted simply, exhaling deeply.

"Whose?" Sora asked.

"....Sephiroth," Cloud replied, and his eyes opened, looking toward Aseles again.

"Oh..." Aseles mouthed, nodding slowly. "Um....is there any way to stop him?"

Cloud straightened up more, his eyes turning to Sora, "If you see him...be careful. His darkness is almost like a luring line; he'll make you think that's the only way for everything."

"...Alright, Aseles seems to know who it is....right?" Sora blinked, looking between the two, making Aseles stiff in place. Cloud nodded. "Then we'll tell you if we find him, right?" Sora turned his gaze to her.

"Um, right," she nodded in response.

"Is everyone else at Merlin's?" Donald asked next.

"Yes. They're waiting for you," Cloud replied.

“Alright, c’mon guys!” Sora replied as he began to hurriedly lead the way again, running down the steps as his group followed.

Upon arrival at the study, the door was already left open, with Cid inside and typing away energetically at the keys on the computer. Beside him was Yuffie, leaning over with Aerith or Merlin nowhere in sight. Sora entered first.

“Hey, guys, what are you up to?” he questioned, placing his hands on his hips.

“Oh, finally you’re here!” Yuffie replied. “The Heartless are raging all across the town, and so are those pesky Nobodies. The security walls are failing, and Cid is trying to repair them.” Cid seemed to be mumbling under his breath as Aseles leaned over Sora’s shoulder, looking at the thousands of words Cid was writing per minute.

“Sounds like trouble alright. How can we help?” Sora asked determinedly.

“Well Leon is waiting for you inside the building by the Postern. If you see him, he’ll tell you what to do,” Yuffie nodded quickly.

“On it,” Donald nodded this time. Once again the four set out of the Study to head over to the Postern. They had set foot into the Bailey...when Aseles heard something pop up. She swiftly turned to look behind, seeing three little...sprites of some sort flying around, the leader it seemed being a brunette, followed by two other female sprites with one blond and the other gray-haired.

“Excuse me....but are you four with the Restoration Committee?” the leader asked as Sora, Donald and Goofy turned at the end of her sentence.

“Uh....yeah, why?” Sora raised an eyebrow, quite surprised of their size. They seemed to have the form of humans.

“What is Leon up to?” the brunette asked once more.

“Leon is-“

“Don’t see why we have to answer to some strangers like you,” Aseles cut off Sora, clearing her throat. He looked to her, but she turned away to look at the three, “Who are you three?”

“Well....uh.....” the blond one began.

“Nothing to report, let’s go,” the gray-haired sprite replied, looking to her two companions.

“We can’t go back without giving her something,” the brunette turned to face her, hands in fists.

“Fine....you do the talking,” the annoyed sprite replied, and was gone in a bright flash. The two others looked at one another, and smiled nervously as they turned to face the group.

“So sorry about this!” the brunette bowed, and was then gone in her own flash, which left the blond to simply pose a goodbye before she was gone too.

“Well that was weird,” Goofy scratched his nose.

“It’s best to not tell what everyone else is doing to some strangers, right?” Aseles replied, looking to Sora.

“...Right,” Sora blinked as he continued to lead the way.

The pathway to the building was infested with Heartless, though they were quickly taken care of as they hurried their way up to the Postern and inside the building that resided near it. Once inside, the walls were covered in thick and thin pipes of all sizes, connecting from the ceiling, the adjacent walls, or from the floor. Sora led the way first as Aseles stuck relatively close behind, but it wasn't long before they ended up making a circle, and taking a different direction. The place seemed like a maze, and unkempt for years with cobwebs hanging from the corners of the floors and ceiling with battered metal residue resting among the broken tiled floor. It was until they reached the open area that Aseles knew they were approaching the end, and finally at the end of a long hallway was a brown door, leading to their entrance of wherever Leon might be.

The mini-library held shelves to the ceiling, with hundreds of books pressed among each other, though a few had fallen to the ground and were dismantled with ripped pages. The walls were running with leaks and mold with a few frames hanging of some sort of studies, other on the hinges. A white, curving desk sat in the middle of the room with a throne-like chair behind it. Large pipes from the far, upper wall connected to the curving ceiling. A few glass chambers were destroyed along the floor and desk with more cobwebs among the walls and thrown books among the floor. However, Aseles's eyes connected to the far portrait near the desk, with Sora slowly approaching it, almost cautiously.

"Ansem..." he replied lowly, standing in front as Donald and Goofy looked at the painting in bewilderment.

"Ansem?"

"This must be his room...don'tcha think so?" Goofy asked.

"Hello..." Aseles swiftly turned to face the door, seeing a woman with long, straight hair in sight, adorned in a black outfit. Her gloved hand waved as Aseles tilted her head. A lot of visitors today.

"Hey," Sora waved. "Um...is there something you need?"

"I'm looking for a guy with spikey hair," she replied. Aseles raised an eyebrow, and immediately thumbed to Sora.

She giggled and shook her head, "Spiker." The four shrugged.

"I'll just take a look around then," she smiled, entering. Aseles blinked to her, but shook the thought out and turned to Sora, Donald and Goofy.

"So whose Ansem?" she persisted.

"Ansem..." Sora sighed, pointing to the painting, "Is the guy we defeated in our first journey. He was controlling the Heartless and trying to take over the worlds, and.....took Riku away."

"He also made the King stay behind," Donald crossed his arms.

"Oh....which is why you all got separated from them?" Aseles asked. The three nodded. Aseles walked forward and inspected the portrait, tilting her head with hands in pockets. She narrowed her eyes at the figure, raising an eyebrow from the familiarity she was getting from it. Why did this gu- BANG.

Aseles jumped in fright, looking to see the portrait tremble from with wall the woman had kicked on the other side. She looked back as the group blinked rapidly to her.

"Sorry to bother you," she smiled and began to head to the door, leaving the four alone.

“Hmm.....Ansem...” Aseles hummed to herself, rubbing her cheek.

“Yeah....but it’s a good thing he’s gone...or else we wouldn’t be here,” Sora crossed his arms, standing beside her.

Aseles looked to him, “Good job for getting rid of him. He didn’t seem like a good guy.”

“Finally here huh?” Leon walked into view as they all turned to look at him smiling.

“Leon!” they greeted.

“So, ready to see what I have in store?” he questioned, smirking.

MOMENTS LATER:

So....who knew the wall that the woman had kicked was really a secret passageway into a computer room? Really, what were the odds, but this Ansem guy seemed equipped with everything to hide whatever....he wanted to hide.

Once inside, Leon directed everyone to the computer, and indicated it held Ansem’s codes and information of practically everything....which made Aseles’s heart elevate. If it knew everything.....could it possibly know about Aseles? She wasn’t sure, but it was worth a shot.

But before she could even approach it, Sora was the first to do so, seeming eager to find his friends. She couldn’t blame him really....the poor guy had been looking for them for such a long time now. Instead she stood by Leon with hands in pockets, Leon watching Sora intently as Sora pressed onto the keys.

“Where are Riku and Kairi?” he asked himself, but the keys didn’t seem to be working on his command. “C’mon!” he suddenly slammed his hands against the keys, looking at the screen intently.

“Easy....you want to break it?” Leon warned.

“Oh....sorry,” Sora turned, sweat-dropping as he rubbed his head.

“Maybe you’re not pressing the keys hard enough,” Donald replied, crossing his arms.

“What....what gave you that idea? I’m pressing them just fine!” Sora retorted back. Aseles rubbed her cheek; here we go.

“Watch!” Donald suddenly hopped onto the keyboard, slapping his webbed feet on it. Aseles stared at him in disbelief as Leon’s eye twitched. Goofy raised an eyebrow to the duck as Sora blinked.

“Donald.....that’s dumb,” Aseles replied.

“What!?” Donald moved his feet over, facing her. Suddenly sirens blasted around the room, making the group freeze. This...couldn’t be good.

**“Attention current user, this is a warning. Further misuse of this terminal will result in immediate defensive action.”**

“Donald, see what you did?” Sora groaned. The sirens died down as Donald slowly lifted his left leg, and accidentally stepped onto the keyboard once more rather than the side panel. The sirens blared once again.

“DONALD!” Sora and Goofy shouted as Aseles slapped her hand against her face, Leon merely holding the bridge of his nose in dismay.

“I’m sorry!” Donald replied. Goofy hurried over as he picked up Donald from the keyboard.

“**Decision gate reached. You are now under arrest,**” the male voice boomed once more. Was...was it coming from the computer??

“Arrest?” Sora asked, moving back from the keyboard. Yeah...these guys were....yeah. No words.

Goofy finally was able to pluck Donald away from the keyboard, but the duck seemed to fuss in Goofy’s grasp. Sora hurried over, pulling Donald off and grabbing his hands while Goofy grabbed his feet.

“Let me go!” Donald quaked.

“RUN!” Leon shouted. Aseles jumped from his sudden burst, and turned too late to see that a beam had shot out from the right, the machine-like beam coming to life. It struck Sora as he had let go of Donald, with Donald hanging onto Goofy with dear life. They stood frozen as grids ran over their silhouettes, the pixels breaking apart and began to be collected from the beam.

“W-What’s happening!?!” Aseles hurried forward, but was pulled back by Leon as both watched in alarm. “Sora, Donald, Goofy!” The suction of the machine burst inward and the three were now gone.

“W-Where did they go?!” Leon finally let go as Aseles looked at the machine, then back at him.

Leon opened his mouth, blinking rapidly, “I’m....not sure.”

“...Will they be alright?” she asked, looking at the computer screen.

“...I’m sure they’ll be fine...” Leon nodded reassuringly. He slightly smiled as he crossed his arms gently, “They can handle themselves....they’ve been in more sticky situations than this.” As bad as this seemed, Aseles decided to take Leon’s words into it. They would be back...soon...one way or another.

“Leon...does this computer...really hold everything?” Aseles replied.

“Huh?” Leon tilted his head, “Why...are you looking for something in specific?”

“Well uh....” Aseles fiddled with her fingers, “I wanted to know...if it knew where my home was....” Silence commenced.

“Follow me,” Leon replied, holding onto her shoulder and leading her out of the Computer Room. Aseles glanced back at the keyboard one last time before being pushed into what seemed like Ansem’s Study. Leon patted onto the desk, standing beside it. Aseles gave him a questioning look, but from his opened hand, he was gesturing her to sit, and she did so. Her legs hung over the edge as she placed her folded hands in between her thighs, looking up at Leon.

“I should’ve clarified; when I said everything, I meant everything that corresponded to Ansem. Unless you have known him....then I don’t think the information in store holds anything that is of value to you...”

“....OH.... I see.” Aseles’s mood completely dropped, making her stomach churn and twist in disappoint. Great, back to square one.

"I understand that you want to find answers for what happened; it will be difficult, considering you don't remember much of it, or why it must've happened. Ansem was stopped from taking over the worlds, so we don't know why your world went under the black plague of it, unless Maleficent invaded it like the rest."

"Who is....Ansem specifically?" Aseles recollected the statements, "Cloud tells me Ansem was a fake, but I'm guessing the title of him? Because Sora says that Ansem is the one in the picture frame." Aseles pointed to it

Leon looked to the direction, and then back, "What they both say is true, from our perspective. Ansem was thought to be the one to help get rid of the Heartless because of his research and notes, but it turns out he was an imposter to do so; Ansem was controlling them with the help of his reports and findings."

"So how did....everyone else get involved in it?"

"Maleficent had joined forces with Ansem, but was met with her demise once her heart reached full potential of the Darkness. It consumed her, turned her into a puppet almost. As for Sora, Donald and Goofy, the trio was united in Traverse Town, when their King had requested them to find the keyblade wielder to help rid of the Darkness."

"Oh...." Aseles nodded slowly.

"Sora was set to find his friends, and the warriors were set to find their King, though Ansem was an obstacle. They prevailed, but Riku was possessed by the Darkness a little too late. I don't know exactly what happened after, but from what they told us, the King was left with Riku behind the door of Kingdom Hearts."

"So.....let me get this straight. Ansem and Maleficent joined forces, and were both defeated by Sora, Donald and Goofy. They got separated from their friends and are now looking for them, while destroying more Heartless and Nobodies? What I don't get is why there are still Heartless around.....and...What is Kingdom...Hearts?"

Leon crossed his arms, sighing sadly, "There are still Heartless because there is still Darkness. There is Darkness, within every heart." Great, another Cloud moment. "Kingdom Hearts on the other hand is the door Ansem was looking for. By gathering the Princesses of Heart, he was able to open it, but failed to do so when Sora and the others intervened."

"What does that door exactly do?" Aseles blinked.

"Not sure exactly, but rumors are that door holds significant amount of power, but again...none too sure of what I'm saying. It was something Ansem wanted to use for his personal gain, and it would not have ended well if he had won."

"Yeah...I see your point," Aseles nodded. "So, any idea what Organization XIII wants?"

Leon shook his head slowly, "Their intentions are well hidden....can't possibly know for sure. Same goes for what they want with you...." Oh right...she had forgotten about that.

"Leon....I saw someone at Twilight Town, but I wasn't sure who it was..."

"Someone?" he raised a brow. "From the way you say it....it's been on your mind."

"It has...but not a lot. Nothing happened it was just....it was this man I think, and he was on the other side. He wore a lot of red...but that's all I can think of him wearing. He was gone pretty quick once I spotted him."

“Do you believe it’s another trick of the Organization?” Leon leaned in slightly.

Aseles shook her head, looking up to him as he rested beside, his rear pressed against the edge of the desk beside, “No...I don’t believe so.”

“Then just keep your guard up. C’mon, you need to rest.”

“Um....are you sure leaving them here is a good idea?” Aseles replied, slipping off the desk and looking toward the Computer Room.

“We’ll come back....we just need to get you something to eat,” Leon smiled. “I don’t think they’ll be coming out any time soon-” The moment froze as Aseles heard the sound of something clinking...while walking.

The sound was all too familiar as Aseles readied herself, facing the door. Leon watched, but was quick to retrieve his gunblade out, pointing it to the open door. Before he could fire a spell, the door was creaked open by a tiny figure, adorned in a black cloak. Aseles instantly recognized the two rounded ears, her mouth dropping from the sight.

“Mickey!” she shouted.

“SHHH!” the mouse placed a finger in front of his lips. Aseles’s hand slapped against her mouth as Leon stared in surprise.

“Your Majesty.....you weren’t supposed to be here so soon,” he replied.

“I had to come as soon as I could,” Mickey nodded, removing his hood. Though his smile faded, and his eyes narrowed, “And we’ve got trouble. The Heartless are continuing to rampage. They’ve already destroyed part of the Bailey below.”

“Then I’ll go!” Aseles nodded quickly.

“It’s too risky, you can’t go on your own,” Leon replied. Aseles turned to him, but he slowly smirked, “Well, you won’t be going alone after all.” He held his gunblade firm in his grasp.

“Where are Sora, Donald and Goofy?” Mickey questioned.

“They’re in the computer system. They were arrested by the MCP,” Leon replied.

“Well that’s not good news,” Mickey replied, rubbing his head. “But I’ll hold the fort here, in case any of the Heartless tries to attack the Study.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” Leon nodded.

“Good luck, and be careful!” Mickey nodded.

Once he finished, Leon set off to lead as Aseles followed behind, keyblade in hand as she rushed out of the building and down the Postern. Down the long stretch of tile and gravel, the end of the Bailey had been dismantled from the right, leaving a gaping entrance. Down the pathway was a large open area, leading to what seemed like a ravine with crystalized gems glittering the sides.

“Don’t think you’re fighting alone!” Up on the Bailey came a rushing Yuffie, Cloud and Aerith.

“Nice to know you could make the party,” Leon smirked.

“You ready, Aseles?” Yuffie grinned, patting her back.

“Yup, you know it!” she nodded.

“I want everyone to take one section of the Ravine and set up a perimeter,” Leon began. Aseles’s eyes traveled to the large open area at the far end, her eyes widening to see a stretch of moving lines approaching the town. It was a whole army of Heartless, with swords in hands and claws and feet pounding the ground.

“Ready whenever you are, Aseles,” Leon nodded. Aseles looked to him, then to the others who stood readily in sight.

“...Alright, let’s go!” she narrowed her eyes and nodded once, turning and jumping down from the sloping mountain side. She streamed downward like a surfer as the others stuck close beside, approaching the entrance of a crumbled field below. Aseles approached quickly, though the area seemed ominous. Aseles slowed down, looking among the place as Leon and the others passed by. Suddenly a large wall of a clear force field rose, her face hitting it as she shook it. Her hand punched against it as she then swung her keyblade against it, but to no use.

“LEON!” she shouted, but the Heartless armada had already approached the group, trapping them into a fighting, war zone. She watched in horror as she looked back, seeing that a dark portal had emerged, revealing an Organization XIII member, his hood already off.

The male had some sort of short, dirty blond mullet, with a few strands resting in front of his forehead and hanging around the front of his eyes. His eyes vibrated a bright color of sapphire. He placed one hand on his hip, slouching to one side with his other hand held out toward Aseles.

“Say, you’re looking lively today. What’s the occasion?” he smiled.

“...You can’t be serious,” Aseles gritted her teeth, wanting to bash her head against the invisible wall. She could only hope it was hard as the brick floor.

“What? Aren’t you happy to see me?” he replied, smiling innocently.

“....No...Not really no,” she replied, deadpanned. “...Heeey.....I know that sassy stance...weren’t you in the Underworld??” She held her keyblade up, pointing it to him, “Who are you, and what do you want?”

“You can call me Demyx, but that doesn’t change the fact that I’m not planning to leave you here, *all by yourself*,” Demyx cooed. Aseles blinked, and realized that the fear was slowly starting to creep in. With no one around, they did not suspect that she was here, along with this member, but fighting in the hoard of Heartless below.

“I’m not alone!” Aseles retorted back, gulping to herself. This was not good. At. All.

“Tsk tsk, lying already Aseles? You’re begging to be punished,” Demyx held a finger up, waving it in front.

“Yeah? Psh, I would like to see you try,” Aseles growled and readied herself in a stance.

“Oh, come on! You want to fight? That’s not really the best choice,” he replied, almost sulkily. He held his forehead with his fingers, mumbling, “They picked the wrong guy for this...”

“Then I’d rather you just let me go,” Aseles spat back. “I don’t want to have anything with the likes of you! You’re nothing but a coward.”

Demyx’s smile dropped, a finger threateningly pointing to her, “You shouldn’t judge anyone by



appearance!” Aseles gritted her teeth as Demyx suddenly shot his arm up, tilting his head at her, “Last chance to cooperate.” Aseles said nothing.

Demyx shouted as the pulling of water suddenly cascaded toward his open palms, creating a dome around himself. The water rushed in high speed, forming a large bubble. It erupted as the droplets fell wonderfully around Demyx’s body with a large sitar holding the shape of the Organization symbol appearing in his hand.

“Now.....dance water! DANCE!” Demyx shouted as he strummed the sitar down. The ground splashed as the walls of erupting water came forward, shooting straight forward. Aseles gasped in surprise and dodged to the side, but was not quick enough to pull her arm away.

Aseles flew back in a spin and hit the barrier, groaning loudly in pain as she stood up, wincing with her clothes drenched in water. The water was unmistakably powerful and quick. Could she win this fight alone?

"Don't make me play hardball!" Demyx teased. He lifted his guitar up again, “Dance water!” Aseles’s eyes widened as a second water wall came.

Aseles spun her keyblade in front like a windmill, “FIRE!” The flames erupted in high energy as the water wall made contact, Aseles’s feet sliding against the ground as she continued to spin it. Demyx grunted as the water wall died down and was pushed over and crashed onto the floor behind her. Aseles turned back to look at it, but quickly looked forward to see Demyx striking the head of his sitar forward, the blades cutting across the air neatly. Aseles threw herself to the side and charged, swinging powerfully against the body of his weapon in deadly smite.

“You’re not making this easy!” Demyx retorted in anger, continuing to block. He suddenly shot up as a beam of water became his platform. He looked down at Aseles as she backed up, holding her keyblade defensively.

“There’s no way I’m going with you!”

“I’m going to have to clean up that mouth of yours!” Demyx lifted his sitar and strummed it deviously. Aseles blinked, looking to the sides of the rock walls, and see they were bubbling with water. “Dance water, dance!”

The water beams and projectiles shot forward as she ducked, but then she quickly jumped up as the beams continued to chase after her. She ran front to back, dodging them easily. Her eyes targeted to Demyx and ran to his water beam that continued to hold him upright. Her eyes widened to find a sharp beam of water hitting her shoulder, sending her hurling back.

Before she could react, the large beam at the left came, shooting her across the air and sticking her shoulder to the rock wall with both feet off the ground. Aseles looked away as the world blurred, the water stinging her eyes as it entered them forcefully. The air was slowly removing itself from the shooting water, and soon she found herself caught in a rushing waterfall of water. Aseles swung her keyblade at the water, but it did not seem to budge. Her lungs began to fill up with the liquid as her movements dimmed.

“NO!” she gurgled as her hair flamed up, the water steaming off. Her red eyes shot up as her vision brightened in maroon, watching Demyx grin. She coughed harshly, falling to her knees as she held onto her keyblade.

“This isn’t over!” Demyx replied, and Aseles could hear the strums once more.

Aseles dodged to the side, her hair drying from its drench as her clothes stuck to her skin. She

looked to the side to see Demyx was on the ground again, strumming to the floor. Loud and sharp bursts of water shot up from the ground as Demyx walked forward. Aseles charged forward, keyblade spinning in hand, though the burst of water caught her off-guard, throwing her off her feet. Before she could retouch, another burst of water sent her flying higher, and then another, and another, hitting against her skin horrifically.

“C’mon, keep to the beat!” Demyx teased. Aseles finally rolled out of the way, looking up to see Demyx approaching with his bursting walls again.

Aseles pointed her keyblade forward, jumping up from the wet floor, “THUNDER!”

The jolts pounced forward as the water made contact with the spell, electrifying the whole floor and Demyx’s sitar. He shouted and screamed in his position as Aseles pushed her feet toward the wall from her leap, and then shot forward like a missile. She spun in place with keyblade outstretched, the Thunder spell working along the rim of it. She struck forward as the keyblade made contact with Demyx, and all was still.

He fell to the ground as the water surrounding the area broke down, slowly washing away down the crevices and cracks of the gravel floor. The sitar disappeared from view as Aseles backed away, her eyes reverting back to blue. She blinked to the defeated Demyx as he continued to kneel, his arms by his sides, limp and useless with fingers twitching. His eyes lifted up to look at her, weary and drained. Aseles’s eyes widened in horror and guilt as she lowered her keyblade. His feet and hands began to dissolve from view.

"Don't make me go there, it's dark..." Demyx said shaking his head slightly at Aseles. Aseles looked down to him, hurrying forward as she knelt before him and placing her hands on his shoulder. He looked up to her as he continued to dissolve slowly.

“I’m...so sorry,” Aseles replied, eyes trembling as they searched his face. He smiled to her, slightly scoffing. In a burst the black ashes erupted up, leaving nothing left of Demyx’s existence, except for the water remaining on her clothes. The barrier was brought down as Aseles stood, picking up her keyblade as she looked away down to the Ravine.

“Hey!” Aseles turned, seeing Sora, Donald and Goofy running with Mickey leading. Aseles hurried forward and hugged the three in a tight embrace. They hugged back.

“Aseles, why are all your clothes wet?” Sora questioned. Aseles let go, recalling back to Demyx.

If....winning against the Organization was to defeat them all...it seemed like something villainous to do. Despite winning, Aseles felt she had lost more than she gained....seeing as how they could feel. Could they feel? However, that did not excuse the fact that they were up to something with her.

“I had an encounter with a member, but c’mon, Leon and the others need help!” Aseles quickly added.

Sora looked to her concerned, but nodded, “Right!”

“Let’s go, our friends need us!” Mickey nodded quickly, removing his cloak in a haul. The rest followed behind him and slid down the slope to the Ravine where the encounters of the Heartless grew vastly.

Leon and the others stood readily at each pinpoint of the Ravine in different sections, aiding the group along as she continued to trek through the battles with ease. The Heartless were vast in numbers, but with the power of the group combined, they stood no chance.

Aerith was careful to stay beside everyone for healing purposes and Cloud slashed the area with his enlarged sword, swinging aimlessly around as the rest ducked. Leon came in swinging and sharply as his fire spells combined with Donald's, sending the hoard of Heartless blazing to their deaths. The woman from before, adorned in black was named Tifa, had joined the fight as he hit the Heartless simply with fists and feet, sending them flying like rag dolls.

Once reaching the end, Aseles found, Sora, Donald and Goofy trying to catch their breaths, hands on knees or resting against the ground.

"C'mon guys, we're almost there!" Mickey came from behind as he stood on top of a crystal pillar, pointing forward. Aseles looked to his indication, and her mouth dropped from the vast majority of the Heartless approaching in quick speed. They covered the whole maw of the ditch. The soreness was simply breathtaking, but she knew they were almost there: defeating these last Heartless were the ticket to winning this war raging on.

"We'll never finish," Donald groaned.

"We'll finish it! Together!" Sora replied as he readied his keyblade out. The rest looked to him as he grinned, facing the three with Mickey by his side, "Leon and the others are counting on us! We won't let this world be run over by Darkness!"

"YEAH!" Aseles shouted with Donald and Goofy.

Sora slid down the next slope as the rest followed with Mickey beside. They reached the bottom as the ground shook terribly from the charging Heartless. Their steel-covered bodies rattled and quaked. Their yellow eyes narrowed into dangerous slits.

"READY?" Sora shouted, reading his stance.

"READY!" the rest shouted. The air intensified as the Heartless were now in close range. In a burst, Sora's whole figure flashed into bright white as two keyblades spun his hands. Aseles's eyes flashed back to red as her hair wavered and shot upward, whipping in deadly flames. The keyblade electrified in red bolts as she gritted her teeth.

"CHARGE!" Sora commanded as they all did so, stomping the ground as Aseles's body ran alongside Mickey, with Donald and Goofy and Sora following on the other side. Her keyblade spun in front as she knocked the first two Heartlesses into the air and rampaged through the thick army.

"FIRE!" The flames swirled among and spread as Aseles spun faster, the Heartless simmering and turning to ash at her feet. The Heartlesses closed into the gap as she spun her keyblade around like a boomerang in an array of directions, the group of Heartless dropping to the ground. She proceeded to swung and duck, yelling in the upmost determination to win. Her blood raced in extreme agility as the winds encircled her being, having lost sight of the others in the rampaging mess of enemies.

The numbers slowly began to diminish to the point where Aseles could see Donald casting a whole array of powerful spells, making the clouds thunder above from the harsh Thundaga hexes. Finally the numbers reached the hundreds, then the nineties, the seventies, the forties, the twenties, and finally the tens.

Aseles smashed her keyblade against the two around her as Mickey took charge to finish three of his own. Goofy handle one while Donald and Sora ended the fight with the last four being taken care of. The air released into a soft tune as Aseles fell onto her rear, her hair falling down around her shoulders. She looked up to see Goofy in the same position on the other side, Sora and Donald

with hands on their knees and Mickey striding to stand in the center.

“All for one!” he held his keyblade up as it shined magnificently in the approaching rays of the sun. The rest smiled and held their weapons up just the same, “One for all!”

The battle was won.

#### BACK IN ANSEM’S STUDY:

Aseles had approached the Study not too long ago and she was standing beside Leon who was leaning against the wall, his arms crossed as he looked toward the portrait of where Sora was pointing at. After the whole chaos, it had brought attention to something Mickey had said earlier Aseles guessed, because Sora was not letting the matter go down so easily. I guess he brought the rest of his group as backup for his statement, though mainly Aseles was there because she was curious.

Sora began, “No, Mickey, this guy is Ansem. See? Don’t you remember? We fought him in the end.” He was arguing throughout the whole trip here, and just when she had thought he had been tired from the fight, his mouth sure wasn’t.

“Did you forget what Ansem looked like, Your Majesty?” Donald asked.

Mickey seemed offended slightly, but his cheery disposition did not waver, looking toward the portrait, “And I am positive this is not him!”

“It took *forever* to defeat him, and now you’re saying it’s not him?” Sora placed his fists on his hips, titling his head to the side.

“Oh...that’s right....I never finished....explaining,” Mickey stated carefully, tapping his chin with a finger. Aseles’s eyebrows rose as Sora, Donald and Goofy glanced at one another in utter confusion, leaning forward.

“What do you mean, Your Majesty?” Goofy asked.

Mickey took a couple of steps forward, eying the portrait carefully, “Well, the man in the picture is definitely the one who tried to conquer Kingdom Hearts, the one you fellas defeated.” He nodded once, and then turned to look at the three, “But you really fought was his Heartless.” Sora jaw seemed to have dropped along with Donald’s, though Goofy just seemed lost on what Mickey just said. Aseles tilted her head, scratching her cheek.

“His...Heartless?” Donald blinked.

“Yup! He wasn’t really the real Ansem, he just went around telling everybody that he was,” Mickey crossed his arms, nodding once. The trio stood absolutely still, their eyes leveled on Mickey who smiled to them.

“*WHAT!?!?*” they shouted as Aseles slightly jumped, Leon blinking in surprise. Mickey jumped back a bit, looking up at them.

“We went through *all* that trouble to defeat an imposter?!?” Sora exclaimed, groaning as he gripped his hair from the top. He leaned toward Mickey who stared at him in shock, “Why didn’t you tell us *before* we went in *charging* to *our* deaths???”

Mickey suddenly smiled, nodding quickly, “Yup! A fake, but that doesn’t mean he should’ve been going around and taking over the worlds neither! He had to be stopped, so really, you had to go charging in there.” Nicely put Mickey, nicely put.

“Awwwwww, I can’t believe it!” Donald sighed angrily, crossing his arms.

“Uh...I’m kinda confused,” Goofy scratched his head, “If he’s a fake, then what happened to the real Ansem?”

“That’s what I’m tryin’ to figure out. He should know all about Organization XIII’s intentions, and what is happening to the worlds,” Mickey’s smile dropped, but he continued to hoist up his determination. “If we find him, I’m sure he will help us in whatever way he can.”

“Hmmm...” Goofy began, holding his chin as he stared intently into the portrait, “If the fake Ansem had a Heartless, does that mean he had a Nobody too?”

“Not had, he does,” Mickey nodded to Goofy, “He is the leader of the Organization.”

“WHAAAAAAT?!” the trio shouted again.

“Oh no...” Leon sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“It all...just seems like bad news,” Aseles whispered toward him.

“It doesn’t seem to be getting any better to be honest,” Leon sighed again. “Just when you thought things couldn’t get more complicated...”

“I’ve met this fake Ansem before,” Mickey began, pointing to the portrait of the silver-haired man, “And I’ve met with the leader of the Organization as well, once. It was...weird....felt like being around the same fella.”

“So where did you meet him? The fake Ansem?” Sora asked, but he seemed quite hesitant to ask, seeing how things weren’t going so....well with this new information.

“Gosh....I can’t remember, it’s been a while,” Mickey shook his head. “But if we find the real Ansem, Ansem the Wise, he will tell us the true identity of the imposter. That is why I’m looking for him, to ask him about it.”

“Jeez.....just when you thought- Your Majesty, do you know where Riku is?” Sora quickly intervened in his statement, shooting his eyes toward Mickey.

Mickey seemed to have jumped in his place, but looked away, shielding his expression from view. Aseles walked forward, blinking gently as she went to go stand beside Sora with Donald and Goofy at his other side. His blue eyes did not waver from the mouse, but Mickey seemed completely broken to answer his question.

“I...can’t help you,” Mickey shook his head. “I’m sorry.” Sora took a couple of steps forward, trying to grab Mickey’s eyes, but the mouse turned the other way. Oh no Mickey...come on.

“Oh boy...” Donald muttered to himself as Goofy slightly frowned.

“Are you...sure? I mean...” Sora began, kneeling slightly, but he only stood upright once more. Aseles quirked the corner of her mouth into a frown at the sudden change in the air. Just when she thought friends could help Sora find his other friends....

“I’m sorry, Sora,” Mickey finished.

“What about Kairi? We met up with some friends in Twilight Town, and they said a member of the Organization kidnapped her when she arrived,” Sora interjected.

“What? This can’t be!” Mickey shot his eyes finally to Sora, who nodded to him. Mickey looked back to the portrait, gripping his jaw in a gloved hand, “It seems Organization XIII is putting to motion things we are not anticipating. It is important you go to the other worlds, and check how things are. From the way things are going....it can’t be good.” Sora, Donald and Goofy nodded.

Mickey suddenly turned to Aseles, walking a couple of steps, “Aseles, we can’t thank you enough for helping us.”

“Um...me?” she raised a brow. “What I mean is...you don’t really need to thank me.”

“But we do. You are intertwined with what is to come, and it’s important that you decided to stick to our side. Helping your friends is most important, than helping yourself.” Mickey smiled, “Isn’t that right?”

Aseles blinked, feeling a ton of bricks hitting right on top of her. All this time...she was so curious on what Organization XIII wanted...to be accepted by them that she was willing...to betray Sora, Donald and Goofy for it. They were her friends...and yet....

Aseles nodded back, “Yeah....of course. Thanks....for everything.”

Mickey seemed to have gotten the hint, and winked rapidly, “Of course.”

“Be sure to rest up,” Leon nodded as he stood straight. All of them turned to look at him, “Aerith wouldn’t want you to go on an empty stomach.”

## Reappearance

FFW:

The gummi ship was warm and lively as the four sat in their according seats, looking out to the window and refreshed in energy. It wasn't as silent as other trips, but it was probably because of the buzzing questions they all had during the whole chaos in Hollow Bastion.

It was a shame Mickey did not stay for long, but Sora was reassured that Riku was fine....somewhere. The thoughts for his friends never seemed to waver, and that's what made Sora very likable; he was hardly ever down at the tasks in hand, whether they were threatening or not. He never lost hope.

"Land of Dragons first, right?" Aseles asked as she drummed her tummy gently.

"Yup!" Goofy answered as scratched his nose, humming gently.

"From what Mickey suggested, no doubt Organization XIII will be there too," Sora replied, walking around at the back in steady paces. Aseles turned the chair around to look at him fully, her legs crossed with her back slightly dragging down against the chair. Donald had his arms crossed, yawning several times here and there, having left the ship in autopilot.

"Well we'll show them not to mess with us," Donald replied, holding a fist up. Really to this point, Aseles could only wonder what they were after in the other worlds, unless they were after the keyholes like Maleficent was before.

The disembarkment was soon after with everyone prepared in their seats as the ship broke the atmosphere of the world. After a few minutes, Donald hovered the ship over the Bamboo Thicket as they all hurriedly unbuckled themselves and jumped out of the opened platform below the ship.

"Hey, who's that over there?" Donald asked. The rest looked at Donald, and then looked to see where he was pointing beyond the bushes of bamboos. He was looking all the way past the camp. Aseles squinted her eyes, suddenly seeing a figure drenched in black clothes, running toward the bases of the mountains in the far distance. Aseles instantly recognized the far ringing of zippers, knowing it was well indeed an Organization member. Whelp.....now it starts.

"Come on, we can't let him get away!" Sora said. The rest followed behind him as he led the way sprinting down the trail, ending up at the camping grounds below, well known as the camp where they had first joined Chang's army.

The pursuit continued as the figure was merely a dark spot in the distance, but their intentions of catching him were sparking as he began to grow larger in size, Sora picking up the pace. Just when he/she had come into distance, they turned around to see the four charging behind, with hearts pumping and legs burning. The person paused for a moment, but they continued to trek up their way up the mountain.

Aseles's feet splashed against the riverbanks as Sora flashed his keyblade out, throwing several lightning and fire spells with Donald who had pulled out his wand, though the spells seemed to stop several yards behind the running person. Aseles had to stop a couple of times briefly to catch her breath as she found themselves running up the mountain's side, the cliffs rumbling with pebbles as the cold air began to kick in. Finally her feet touched snow as Sora continued to lead the way, not faltering with Donald and Goofy and Aseles keeping up pace.

The zippers chimed in the cold air with boots leaving their prints on the ground, the group's feet smashing them off of existence as they continued to follow. Finally they reached the burned tents of the second base, seeing the person had finally stopped near the base of the high slope in the distance.

Sora was gasping for breath along with the rest. The person merely crossed their arms and waited as Sora grabbed his knees, lifting a weak arm up and pointing to them.

"You...won't....ahh...get away..." Sora coughed. Donald merely fell against the snow as Aseles kneeled, Goofy wobbling on his feet.

"Jeezes...the guy has....a lot of endurance," Aseles croaked, finally standing up with trembling legs. Donald followed as he brushed the snow off of his feathers. Sora finally straightened up, his keyblade still out. The person suddenly lifted a hand as they all watched, and saw him beckoning to the rest with the curls of his fingers. Sora's face enraged as the rest readied their weapons out.

"Hey, you, stop!" a voice shouted from behind. The member suddenly jolted up the mountain as the four groaned in annoyance.

"Not again..." Donald grumbled. The rest looked back to see Mulan unexpectedly approaching, her hands holding onto her knees. She tried to catch her breath as the group all nodded in understanding, Donald once again plopping back onto the snow with Goofy leaning against Aseles and Aseles leaning against him.

Sora faced Mulan, "You're chasing him too?"

Mulan gasped for breath, "Yes, as a matter of fact. He's been causing trouble around the palace, so I came to investigate." Mulan said. As usual, Mushu seemed to be sticking right beside her, crawling out of the back of her shirt and aiming his large eyes toward the four.

"Hey, hey, hey! How's it been guys?" Mushu smiled, "Thought I recognized some voices."

"Um...aren't we forgetting something?" Aseles asked, pointing up the mountain slope.

"Oh, right!" Sora nodded quickly as he began to lead the way once again.

"C'mon Donald!" Goofy gripped the back of the duck's shirt, pulling him along as Donald quaked from the surprise, running in the air with Goofy still holding him up. Mulan and Aseles hurried alongside and kept their paces steady against the snowy ground, finding it difficult to kick up from deep floor. Finally, the group found themselves onto the curving ending slope of the mountain, the peak just above in the distance.

The Organization member was finally in visual and stood a good distance away, his tall demeanor facing the rest with his face completely hidden under the shadow of the hood.

"Hey, what's with you?" Sora yelled out to him, his keyblade still out and taking a defensive stance. The rest stood readily beside him, forming a line. The member did not respond, but he suddenly held his hand out in front of him, his weapon swirling into tight wisps among his wrist, and outlining the body of his weapon. Sora's palms shook as he looked at it, Donald and Goofy blinking to it in total surprise. The weapon was shaped like a wing, with red and navy and black, dark and sinister.

Sora finally opened his mouth, ".....R-Riku?!"

At that moment, a large explosion ensued from the peak on top of the huge hill, with thousands of



Rapid Thruster Heartless rushing downward the bottom of the slope where you all stood, hungry for battle.

Sora ran toward the Organization member as the member charged his weapon in contact with Sora's. Before the rest could react, the Heartless had swarmed all over, attacking and piercing against each fighter individually.

Aseles spun in a circle, snapping her keyblade around as the ash of Heartless dissolved into the snow as the small hearts were released from their prisons. In the distance Aseles could see Mulan swinging her sword effectively around, dodging oncoming blows with Donald and Goofy battling their own circles, deflecting and bursting thunder spells all around. Sora seemed to be clashing effectively against the member he had called Riku moments before, and Riku seemed to be holding his own ground, making Sora stumble and grunt. If that was Riku, then why was he fighting Sora?

The ground suddenly shook forcefully as they all lost balance, falling in the cold snow with the Heartless quickly retreating into black twisters. Aseles picked herself up as she suddenly heard a roar in the distance. Aseles shot your eyes up, seeing a large beast had taken flight, and was casting a large shadow among the whole group though no one had seemed to notice. Suddenly the snow beneath began to slide, and up her eyes shot toward the peak again, with an approaching cloud of white smoke rushing down.

"AVALANCHE!" Mushu yelled out as Mulan began to run down the slope along with Donald and Goofy. However, Sora was still in the distance, fighting against Riku.

"Sora!" Aseles yelled out, pointing to the snow that was rumbling down the slope. He turned and his gaze shot up to the peak. He was unexpectedly thrown back against the snow as the member towered over him. Aseles swung her keyblade forward, "Fire!" The scorching ball made contact with the member's weapon. He shot his gaze up to her as Sora shook the snow off of his face. The member began to back away as he called away his blade, a black portal appear behind him.

"Riku!" Sora yelled as held a hand up to him, shooting onto his feet. He dashed, but the black portal was gone, the unidentified person out of visual.

The mountain rumbled much harder as Aseles ran to Sora, snatching his arm and pulling him behind. He kept up pace as she soon let go, the two running side by side down the slope as the cold clouds followed in hot pursuit behind. To their dismay, the cold air kicked behind her and she thought best to brace themselves, her keyblade striking to the ground as she snatched Sora's arm, making him hold onto it. He shut his eyes as Aseles stared up at the oncoming snow, and then ducked down as the huge crash of it consumed the two.

The freezing temperature consumed her body with the snow running into the crevices of her clothes, making her shudder and grit her teeth. Her other hand squeezed Sora's as he did the same. Aseles's hand quickly became numb but she did not dare let go.

After a few minutes, the snow was still, leaving Aseles unheard and unlived. She tried to move, but her body refused its commands. She tried to speak but snow blocked out her whispers. Try as she might to move her fingers, they were frozen in place at the handle of her keyblade.

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*"Who's there?"*

*"Do you seek for answers? Don't you know what the Door to Light is?"*

“...”

*“You’ll soon have to leave it all behind...What you’re looking for...is not here. You’ll find him soon.....”*

\*\*\*

Aseles’s eyes opened as she suddenly felt cold and dry. She pulled out her hand as her body followed. She grabbed the white snow with both hands as she pulled herself up from the tunnel she was caved in. She coughed and shivered, grunting as the snow covered her hair and the top of her eyelashes.

“Aseles!”

Aseles didn’t bother to turn as she wrapped her arms around herself, trying to feel warmth and stop herself from shaking so uncontrollably.

Sora slid to her side as he hugged her, “We were looking all over for you!” he said as he rubbed his palms at her arms and back. Aseles only shivered as she nodded, Sora helping her stand up. Donald, Goofy, and Mulan appeared beside as Mushu got out of Mulan’s shirt again, jumping on her shoulder and blow small flames over her to heat her up.

“Man, what happened to you?” he asked.

“D-do y-y-you real-ly ne-e-ed to ask?”

“We have to take her to the palace right away, just in case she gets hypothermia,” Mulan said.

Sora looked to Donald, “Donald, any potions on you?” Donald came up and pulled one out, pulling the cork open for him. Sora thanked him and tipped the edge of it to Aseles’s lips. She opened her lips willingly and let the warm green substance slip down her throat. In a few moments she began to feel warm again and stood up straighter, though she continued to wrap her arms around herself.

“T-Thanks,” Aseles nodded to them. The group began down the trail slowly, waiting for Aseles as Sora soon wrapped his arm around her shoulders, the snow crunching below her feet. Mulan lead the way, with Donald and Goofy walking behind her.

“How long were you looking?” Aseles asked, feeling a little warmth for her words to finally make sense.

“For about fifteen minutes. I got out, but then I noticed you weren’t nearby, so we trekked down the mountain looking for you,” Sora said.

“Who was that exactly? The one you were fighting?” Mulan asked, turning to look at Sora.

“He’s not a part of Organization XIII,” Sora began. “They’re invading different regions, so we’re trying to catch them in the act...though we’re not sure what exactly.”

“Are you certain the one you fought isn’t part of them?” Mulan asked again.

“Positive,” Sora said. “Riku isn’t one to go with a bunch of phonies like that.”

“Oh, you’re friend, correct? I think you mentioned him once before. Then I suppose that was him. Maybe the one I chased was someone different....hmmm...” Mulan tapped her chin.

The group continued down the mountain trail and once out of the snow Aseles began to feel much better. Mulan began to make her way through the dry and grassy lands with the town in the distance. It was busy with some merchants here and there, but not enough to be a festive day. Mulan continued straight forward through the way as Aseles looked at the adorned festive lights that were turned off along the shops' rooftops, with the smell of fried fish among the air.

Finally they reached a pair of large, red doors at the end of the walkway, Mulan knocking on the huge entrance. At the sight of her, they instantly let them in without question and Aseles followed through the empty courtyard, across the small bridge and heading up the stone steps toward the main doors. Upon knocking, another pair of guards answered, though they seemed....worn out from a fight.

"What's wrong? You seem hurt," Mulan questioned.

"Someone....entered the Emperor's Room without permission. He just barged in," one guard croaked. Donald instantly healed them with Sora as Mulan dashed down the corridor with the rest following swiftly behind. She threw open the doors as Aseles's eyes shot around, seeing the quarters were nicely polished with large pillars made of dark oak, but nothing seemed destroyed, considering there seemed to be expensive porcelain around, and the Emperor was sitting at this throne comfortable at the very end of the expensive, red rug.

Mulan bowed her head to him as she stood respectfully before him with the rest behind her. Beside the Emperor stood Shang, who also seemed worn out and somewhat out of breath.

"Ah, Mulan, Sora, Donald, Goofy, and Aseles, welcome. What seems to be the problem?" the Emperor asked kindly.

Mulan walked a little closer as she began to speak, "The guards in front told us that a man came intruding in your quarters. Surely it wasn't the one who I was chasing before?"

"The man who came in here moments before was not the same man who caused havoc earlier. What was his name...." he tapped a finger at his chin, "Aw yes! Riku."

"I knew it!" Sora shouted as he jumped, making the rest jump at his sudden excitement, "Did he talk to you?"

"By the fact, he did, but he was in a hurry, and was rather rude," the Emperor replied.

"Yup, that *has* to be him!" Sora smiled widely. "So what did he tell you?"

"He told me that this other man in a cloak had appeared, looking for something in the mountains. He didn't stop them in time as the man turned the guarding dragon of the mountains into a Heartless," the Emperor said.

"Wait, hold on a second!" Aseles interrupted. She coughed, blushing slightly at everyone looking to her, "Um...Sorry to interrupt, but when we were on that mountain, an avalanche started...was that where the dragon was? I heard a roar before the mountain gave way." Everyone stood confused toward Aseles as she looked among the ground, "...Ur...you guys didn't hear it? It was pretty loud."

"No," Sora shook his head.

"I didn't hear anything," Mulan blinked.

"...A-Are you sure? It was...*really* loud," her voice began to soften.

“Child,” the Emperor said, standing up on his chair, “It seems you possess a special ability to sense other things no one else is aware of.”

“Well, I guess,” she shrugged, “I just thought...everyone else knew.”

“It seems that you may be right about the cause of the avalanche,” the Emperor said, his hands folded on his chest as he sat down again. Aseles suddenly felt another rumble as She looked around, anxiously looking among the ceiling. That didn’t...feel good.

“The Riku boy did mention something else,” the Emperor continued.

“What?” Donald asked.

“He said that three lads and a lady could take care of it,” he said with a smile. “Indeed it might be your friend, Sora, but it seems Aseles as sensed something outside, correct?” He looked at her. She gave a nod, looking at the ceiling, hearing the dragon’s footsteps clang.

“Where is it, Aseles?” Mulan asked.

“On...the roof,” she said. The guards suddenly rushed forward, encircling the Emperor for his protection.

Shang headed to the group, “I’ll follow you.”

“Thanks, captain!” Sora said with thumbs up. This time it was decided Aseles lead the way despite how intimidating it was. The guards that were once there were now rushing past by Shang’s orders to protect the Emperor at all costs, and once upon arriving at the door, Mulan gave a signal to quiet down. She opened the door gently and began to stick her head out, looking to and fro.

“I think it’s cl-“ Aseles cut her off and gripped her around the waist pulling her back as the large claw came grappling to cling the small entry of the door and the wall. A deep scratch was embedded onto the wooden doors as splinters brushed past her face and Mulan’s.

“Oh jeez! That was close!” Goofy caught his breath.

“T-Thanks,” Mulan quickly nodded.

“Yeah, no problem,” Aseles replied, swinging her keyblade out as she instead took the lead.

“Where is it now?” Shang asked.

“I can’t tell, it’s not moving,” Aseles replied, narrowing her eyes, “I don’t think it’s on the building anymore.”

“Then we charge out the door,” Sora said, getting out his keyblade. Aseles stepped aside for him to take the lead, and he charged after throwing the doors open with a loud bang, the rest following. They all stopped at the open cement area, looking around for the said Heartless.

“There!” Aseles said, pointing on top of the rooftop. There hovered the Heartless dragon, its dark navy scales dark against the cloudy sky. Its palms were stretched outwards like a jet, opened with thin skin fluttering between the long, five fingers, and the ends clawed and sharp. It carried a mix of red-orange, jagged horns on its head, and followed down along its wavering body. Its under-jaw was bright yellow with the Emblem symbol imprinted on it. Below and aligning along the sides of the Heartless seemed to be some kind of gong instruments, and they clanged as the dragon wavered forward and curved to face you all from the side, diving downwards to your position.

“Watch out!” Mulan warned as she dived to the ground, followed by Shang, Donald, Goofy and Aseles. Its large body flew overhead, and as she caught the end of its hooked tail, she found Sora had hitched a ride, climbing himself up onto it. Mulan was quickly to catch his idea and began to run right behind, clinging onto the end and hoisting herself up as the Heartless began to take speed into the air.

Once in the air, Aseles could do nothing but watch as the Heartless made several flips and turns, with Sora and Mulan hanging on tightly while striking at the transformed beast.

“Let’s bring it down!” Donald shouted as he ran towards Goofy. Goofy nodded and placed his shield over himself. Donald leapt upward and landed onto it, Goofy then tossing Donald up vertically. Donald spun in the air and pointed his wand toward the head of the Heartless.

“Thunder!” The air crackled and a large bolt of lightning struck the Heartless, making it fumble and begin to lose air. It began to glide downward as the rest prepared with Donald and Goofy, now seeing it in striking range.

Aseles skidded forward and tossed her keyblade like a boomerang, its head striking a combo at the face of the Heartless. The Heartless roared with its instruments clanking, and suddenly a burst of explosions ensued, throwing all off of their feet with Sora and Mulan striking still above on the beast.

It began to take to the sky again, flapping its wings immensely and throwing Aseles’s hair back from her face. She grunted and skidded on the ground, looking past with squinting eyes to see Shang rushing forward, slicing his sword upward and cutting off one of the horns on the dragon’s head. The Storm Rider threw its head to and fro, falling onto the ground.

“Now’s our chance!” Goofy encouraged as he dashed forward. The rest followed with Sora and Mulan now striking onto the spin of the dragon. It regained consciousness as Aseles continued to fight against it, but again she was thrown back from the floor, skidding across to see it hurriedly began to take flight, dashing upward as Sora and Mulan held onto the back horns of it with it doing flips and turns, trying to knock them both off. Suddenly Mulan had lost grip as she began to fall, shouting in surprise.

“Mulan!” Shang shouted.

“I got’cha!” Donald yelled as he threw his arms out. Mulan shielded her face and landed into his arms, but the weight was too much as she knocked Donald onto his back, slamming into him instead.

“S-Sorry!” she hurriedly stood, rubbing her back and helping Donald up. His eyes spun in his sockets as he rubbed his head, quickly shaking it off.

Once again the dragon began to come into range, and Shang went boldly forward, cutting across the Heartless’s face. It roared and slammed forward, Sora stumbling with Shang now pinned at the ground, his sword flying out of hand.

“Shang!” Mulan cried as Aseles hurried forward. Before she could get there, the dragon suddenly pulled back its head with its mouth opened, letting a burst of lighting head strike toward Shang. Sora immediately pounced forward, blocking the attack and reflecting the spell right back at the Heartless. It flapped aggressively now as it threw Sora to land onto Shang, the two shooting their eyes up to see the dragon continued to flap quickly. Its wings howled as Aseles’s hair and clothes began to whip against her, the formations of twisters beginning to take their course toward the group.

“We ride the winds!” Sora informed as he shot forward, suddenly throwing himself onto the first twister.

“Sora!” Aseles shouted to him in disbelief, but before she could second guess his effort, he was suddenly controlling the twister forward with his keyblade, and shot himself upward, catching onto the dragon’s horn. He slashed his keyblade across its face, and the rest hurried forward, taking their own twisters as the Heartless came into close range.

Aseles sprung upward, catching onto the back horn of it and began to attack immensely at it, feeling it lose air as soon as Goofy and Mulan joined the battle. As soon as Donald and Shang arrived, the Heartless was on ground level again. It suddenly rolled as the group dodged or stumbled off of it, seeing it was flapping its wings again, blowing them all back. It shot its mouth open to their direction, and suddenly a beam of bright blue light surged through the area.

“Split!” Sora commanded as they did so, rolling across the ground or completely ducking as the beam shot overhead. Finally it stopped and flapped its wings once more.

“Don’t let it get away!” Donald shouted and threw his wand forward. A burst of ice shot forward as it clung onto one wing, making it frozen and slam against the cement ground. The Heartless struggled to lift it, and Aseles took her chance to charge with the others, attacking it endlessly. With one last spinning attack of her keyblade, it struck against the chest of it, making it fumble, and then land onto its side. It twitched several times until it no longer moved. It turned slowly into ash as the group all straightened up, the keyblade coming back to Aseles’s hand, though seconds later she called it off, rubbing her back.

“I thought it would never give up,” Mulan exhaled deeply.

“Nice hit, Aseles,” Sora came beside, patting her shoulder.

She looked over to him, “Thanks.”

Shang smiled widely, looking to the four, “Well done soldiers, the Emperor awaits us.”

A FEW MOMENTS LATER:

“Thank you so much,” Mulan and Shang said, bowing their heads. They were all once back outside, having said your goodbyes to the Emperor and were escorted out by his two bodyguards, though Sora had wished to talk to the Emperor alone. Respecting his wishes, the rest waited outside.

“You’re welcome,” Goofy smiled.

“At least Organization XIII won’t be messing around here anymore,” Aseles added.

“If they do though, we’ll be back to help out,” Donald nodded confidently.

“Of course. You are welcomed to come back any time,” Mulan smiled widely. Moments later the doors opened as they all turned, seeing Sora approaching. He smiled toward Mulan and Shang, standing beside Goofy with Donald and Aseles following on the other side.

“Everything is in order, and we should be heading out,” Sora replied. “Hope to see you guys again.”

“Of course. Take care, and have a safe trip,” Shang nodded. The four bowed their heads to him and waved to Mulan, heading toward the Bamboo Thicket to reencounter themselves with the gummi ship.

FFW:

The gummi ship was on auto-pilot as Donald and Goofy slept quietly. Sora sat all the way to the end of the row, his face resting in his palms. He seemed...somewhat distressed after leaving the world, but Aseles hadn't noticed fully until an hour ago. What bothered her was that he wasn't holding his cheery disposition as always, and she somehow guessed it had something to do with the talk he had with the Emperor moments before leaving the Land of Dragons.

Not the one to meddle, she hoisted herself up with all the courage she could muster to cheer him up, walking past behind Donald and Goofy. She rounded Sora's chair, but instead took the approach to sit in front of him, crisscrossed. He looked up from his hands, blinking to her.

"Hey...are you alright? What's wrong?" she asked, leaning forward a bit toward him.

He sat still for a moment, then sighed gently, his eyes blinking, "I...miss them." Ah, so it was about Riku.

"I know it seems hard to accept...but...you'll get your answers soon enough. If you know that was Riku, then it probably was. Not one of us knows him better than you do," Aseles replied. Sora looked up at her again, his eyes shifting from the floor. "Though...I don't know why Mickey didn't want to tell you anything."

"...I just hope...he knows what he's doing," Sora replied at least. Aseles slowly stood up as Sora looked to the ground again, his chin resting in his hands. Aseles bent her body forward slightly, supporting herself on her heels and placed a hand on his shoulder. He looked up to her again.

"I'm sure he knows," she smiled.

Sora smiled kindly to her, "Thanks. I think so too."

FFW:

"It still looks a bit gloomy," Sora said with his hands behind his head.

The four stood before Beast's Castle, the gummi ship hovering from view into the cool night. Sora led the way toward the entrance as he pushed the doors open once he was up the stone steps. It creaked loudly but they silently slipped inside with no trouble. Nothing seemed out of place so far....until Aseles noticed that the entrance was completely lit in bright light. She had to blink a few times to adjust to the sudden change from outside, looking toward the stairs.

"What's up with this?" Sora asked, blinking in surprise.

"I dunno, but I have a-" Aseles said, but she was cut off by Lumiere's voice.

"Ah! Sora, Donald, Goofy, Aseles, welcome!" The four looked down to see Lumiere there, smiling graciously at their arrival.

"What's up with the lights? Doesn't the Beast like it dark?" Sora asked bluntly. Donald rolled his eyes, rubbing his head. Yup, that's Sora.

"Yes, but today is very special," Lumiere said, clapping his wax hands.

"Special?" Goofy asked, tilting his head as he scratched the top of his head.

"Yes indeed." The four turned to see Cogsworth there, his hands on his hips.

"What's so special about today then?" Aseles asked, hands in pockets.

"The Beast and Belle are about to have a dance," Mrs. Potts said, coming beside Cogsworth, nodding energetically.

"A...dance?" the four asked, glancing at one another incredulously. Well...Beast wasn't one to host such a special event really.

"Yes, a dance." They all turned to see Beast walking down the steps at the end of the rug way, adorned nicely in a blue coat with a yellow, golden vest underneath it. Needless to say, the white, puffy shirt below the vest spoke fancy as he approached, the rest walking down with the animated objects tinkering and following behind.

"My, master! You look splendid!" Mrs. Potts commented first, a rosy smile on her lips. The four smiled toward him, but sadly, he didn't seem too thrilled to have them here. He slightly frowned and scowled, and Sora seemed to have gotten the message.

"Umm...sorry for barging in like this," Sora replied, scratching the back of his head nervously, "We had to check how things were." Before Beast could answer, the sound of footsteps approached from above. Aseles looked upward, seeing Belle was wearing a marvelous, shining golden dress, adorned in jewels and that hung around her shoulders, leaving them bare mostly. She smiled warmly to the four, though her eyes drifted toward the Beast.

Beast immediately fixed the collar of his coat and walked up the stairs, heading to greet her. They stood before one another in front of the opening doors leading to the Ballroom within. Lumiere, Mrs. Potts, and Cogsworth immediately followed, leaving the four in the entrance hall as the doors closed to shut themselves silently.

"Looks like we came at a bad time," Goofy said.

"It seems like it. And there's...nothing really wrong around here..." Aseles added, looking among the cleaned up place.

"Well, there's only one way to find out," Donald said, suddenly barging up the steps toward the doors.

"Donald!" Sora shot out, running behind as Aseles shared a worried glance toward Goofy. He merely shrugged as the two hurried behind Sora, with Donald already having opened the doors and skidding to a halt. Sora stumbled forward, halting as best as he could but bumped into Donald, making the duck quack in annoyance. Belle and Beast stood at the center of the ballroom holding hands, Lumiere, Mrs. Potts, and Cogsworth standing by the door.

"You've come to spend the evening with us too?" Cogsworth asked with Belle and Beast turning to catch their eyes.

"Sure," Goofy said. "We'll be extra quiet."

"Of course! The guests are welcomed to stay," Lumiere said. Aseles smiled at his greeting...but she suddenly shot her eyes around, feeling another presence had entered the room. Sora noticed her dodgy expression, but before he could ask, the person had already stated his welcome.

"A welcome indeed." The others dashed forward as Aseles followed, Belle immediately embracing the Beast at the sound of the voice. Beast shot his eyes upward, at the center of the balcony above. There stood an Organization XIII, his face shrouded in the shadow of his hood.

"What are you doing here?! I thought we kicked you out," Sora yelled out.



"You just don't know when to quit, do you?" the man responded, his arms crossed firmly on his chest. Look who's talking...

"Xaldin, get out of my castle!" Beast demanded. Xaldin suddenly snapped his fingers as several Dusks made their presence, but Beast immediately lunged to them, clawing them out of existence.

"I've come to take something dear from you, friend," Xaldin said, referring to Beast and opening a palm toward him.

"Quiet!" Donald yelled out. Beast roared as Aseles could feel Xaldin's grin. Just...perfect.

"Yes, let your anger, frustration, grow," Xaldin said, disappearing in a wisp of darkness.

"What did he mean....take-" Aseles paused, her eyes widening. The Beast roared angrily as he shot forward, throwing the brown doors open with a slam with his pounces trembling the whole castle.

"The rose!" Sora shouted as he dashed out of the room.

Donald, Goofy, Belle and Aseles followed as they all went to the West Wing, running up the stairs, through the large halls and heading toward the chambers where Beast's pounces seemed to be radiating from. Then there was silence as they continued running across the halls until they finally reached the end, the doors toward Beast's room opened.

Sora cautiously stepped forward as the rest slowed down a couple of feet away. Beast's back was visible to them, his head hunched forward as he breathed in deeply and out. He had torn off the clothes he had previously on, brown fur spiked to its end. He looked...angrier than before. He stomped his feet hard to the ground as Aseles heard it rumble. He then slammed his fists to the floor, roaring, causing everyone to jump.

"Calm down, please!" Belle begged as she hurried forward, nearing him.

"Calm down?! How can I calm down?!" Beast whirled around, his eyes piercing toward Belle. Sora immediately stepped forward.

"Hey, what's with you?" Sora shot open his arms, standing protectively in front of her.

"My rose...." Beast said, turning to face the empty small table that stood in the middle of the balcony. Of course Xaldin would.

"Surely you could get another rose," Belle said, her voice not enough with confidence to argue.

"Another rose!? You don't know anything!" Beast said, yelling at Belle once again. Belle backed a step as Sora shot a foot forward.

"Hey, don't yell at her! It's not like she took it!" Sora yelled back, looking angrily just the same at Beast. Beast looked away, his eyes lingering upon the empty table at the end of the room.

"I'm sorry," Belle suddenly said after a few moments of silence.

"Don't apologize, you don't need to," Sora said. Beast grumbled lowly from in front, and he sounded...almost injured, making Aseles cringe and shiver. The day him and Belle wanted to share a dance....it couldn't be. That's what was the most infuriating.

"She shouldn't be, I must," Beast said, "I want you all...to leave the castle."

"But why?" Belle asked as Sora lowered his arms, a frown appearing on his face, along with the rest. He couldn't possibly control himself when such an important thing was taken, and literally his future depended on it...but if he wanted everyone to leave...there would be no hope in retrieving what was his. Had he lost all hope?

"I was turned into a beast, so I should remain a beast, alone. I've tried to change for you Belle, but it seems that...I'll always be this way. Good-bye, Belle...." Beast did not move with his tail hanging in between his legs.

"You can't mean that," Belle clamped her hands on her chest, her eyes shining to him. Beast did not respond as Belle dropped her head. She turned around as Aseles looked to her, seeing she was beginning to head out into the hallway. Sora blinked to Beast, but he nodded for his trio to follow him. Aseles was last and grabbed the handles of the doors, closing it gently.

"Aw, I think his mind's made up," Goofy whispered in dismay, rubbing his chin. Sora and Donald nodded as Aseles's eyes shot up toward Belle who continued to walk, her dress dragging among the rug.

"Look Belle, don't leave," Sora walked ahead, holding her arm gently. She stopped and turned to look at him, the tears now glimmering at the bottom of her lids.

"We'll look for his rose," Donald said as he nodded.

"And then he'll calm down," Goofy said.

"You...r-really think so?" Belle asked, sniffing.

"Yes of course...but first we need to know where to look," Sora held his chin. Aseles turned to look toward the doors, a large frown on her lips. What could Xaldin possibly want with the rose?

MOMENTS LATER:

"Oh my, what a terrible day," Mrs. Potts sighed. The others looked to her, the fire crackling inside the Parlor. Lumiere placed his chin on the side of his candle arm as Cogsworth sat on a chair. Chip leaned against the teapot with a sniff here and there. The Wardrobe had also approached and now stood against the wall, slightly slumping forward. The rest sat on the carpet floor in a circle, though Donald was leaning against the side of the chimney with arms crossed and legs spread out in laziness.

"Mom, does that mean I won't be turned into a boy again?" Chip suddenly asked, everyone looking toward him.

"Don't worry dear, Sora and his friends will help," Mrs. Potts answered, giving her son a slight smile.

"If only there was some way to knock some sense into him," Cogsworth said. "It is his rose, and he must fight for it!"

"We could....hmmm," Aseles slumped her chin into her hand.

After leaving the room, Sora insisted that the group go look around the castle for Xaldin's presence, but none was found. It was as if he completely disappeared, and Aseles could no longer feel his presence around.

"I say we go talk to him!" Goofy said, punching his fist into his gloved hand.

"You think he changed his mind?" Sora asked, looking to him.

"It's the best chance we got!" Lumiere said, rising up to stand correctly.

"Then let's go," Aseles replied.

Once again the four trekked through toward the West Wing, though the anticipation of having Beast yelling at them to leave already was swimming in Aseles's veins. The man was very stubborn, but Cogsworth did have a point; if he did not want to fight what was his, then how could you possibly win against Xaldin to retrieve it? Well, he was hoping.

The Beast's Room was on sight as they headed down the hall, Sora opening the doors as they all stepped into the shaded room. Beast was still...in the same position. He almost seemed made out of stone, cold and dead.

"Hey, Beast," Sora said.

"Go, leave me alone," Beast said.

"No way! You've got to hear this," Sora said with a confident nod. Beast did not argue as Sora decided to continue, "You're our friend. You told us to be fearless, to have courage, to have faith. You gave your life to just save Belle in Hollow Bastion last time, don't you remember?" Sora sighed. "If you keep this up, it only shows us that you don't you're your happiness, Belle, or your servants. Your rose, it gave you hope didn't it? It gives hope to the others too, importantly to Belle, but it seems you just don't care. Don't you remember how the castle was here, before Belle?" Beast picked up his head, somewhat straightening up.

"See? You can't give up, not now, not ever," Sora finished.

"I do know one thing," Beast finally spoke, making Sora smile. "This is my castle, and I thought I told you to leave!" Sora stumbled back a few steps as Beast turned angrily toward the rest, "Or I will drag you out myself!" Aseles took a step forward, Goofy's arm gripping her, but she pulled away, taking a stand in front of Beast.

"Aseles!" Sora whispered, but she did not move, feeling him move behind her.

"Get out, **NOW!**" Beast roared as Aseles stood her ground, her hair blowing back with her arms at her sides. Her hands turned into fists, and finally when he stopped yelling, she shot her eyes up to him, seeing him huffing.

"**NO!**" she shouted back, stomping a foot forward. Beast narrowed his eyes, his mouth gritting underneath him.

"This is my castle!" Beast argued.

"These are my friends!! And I will not let you yell at them!" Aseles shot back, her face slightly turning red. "What's with you?! We're trying to help you and you want us to leave?"

"This does not concern you," he said coldly.

"I won't let that stop me! You have people here who are willing to do anything to help you, and you just...BLAH, throw it at their faces?" she flailed her arms up, taking another step forward. Beast held his ground, his back hunching in order for his face to stare at her properly. The tension rose as the air stilled.

"Aseles-" Sora reached forward, trying to pull her back.

Aseles moved her shoulder out of the way, jabbing a finger forward toward the Beast, "I'm not done yet! If you love her soooooo daaang muuuuch, why are you kicking her out!? I can't believe you would be so selfish as to ignore your feelings, your dreams, your only hope for happiness!" Aseles exhaled deeply, and sighed, continuing to look at him. By Beast's sudden expression, Aseles had calmed down, and she took a breath once more, "...Just know....when you look back at this, later on, you will be angry with yourself for the rest of your life. You chose yourself to remain a beast, not the rose. It's all on you." Beast's eyes seemed to have taken a different demeanor, and she waited for his next reaction. When he didn't say anything, she blinked once, her hands relaxing at her sides.

"So...what's it going to be?" she asked.

"You're right, I shouldn't be doing this," Beast lifted his face, the tail between his legs now perked up.

"That's the spirit!" Aseles smiled.

"Xaldin shouldn't be here! This is my castle!" Beast stomped on the ground once, looking toward Sora, Donald and Goofy.

"Right!" the trio cheered.

"Then let's go," Beast said, leading the way out of his room. The rest followed, running behind and heading to the entrance's hall.

"Well, Beast, you finally came. You had me worried. I thought you had given up for good." Speak of the devil. It seemed that Xaldin had been waiting for the Beast to compose himself. Xaldin stood at the end of the rug, his back against the doors with his arms still firm on his chest.

"Xaldin!" Beast looked angrily toward him, the ends of his fur sizzling.

"What is with you guys?!" Sora yelled out, throwing his keyblade into view in his palm. "What is it that you want? Why are you invading the worlds?"

".....Kingdom Hearts," Xaldin answered. Aseles's eyes widened as Donald, Goofy and Sora stiffed in place. Beast stood at the ready as the door to the Parlor swiftly closed, indicating that the others knew this battle was far from over.

"Why do you want Kingdom Hearts?" Aseles asked, standing defensively beside Sora.

"With Kingdom Hearts....we could exist, fully and completely," Xaldin said, taking off his hood, revealing his black braided hair. His face was sharpened and taunting, his eyes malicious and alluring.

"Huh?" Donald and Goofy said, looking at each other.

"You wouldn't understand...Nobodies like us," he answered coldly.

"So why are you here if you want Kingdom Hearts?" Sora spat angrily.

"I have come here for Beast's Nobody and Heartless," he said simply.

"Beast will never become one of you!" Sora took a step forward, pointing his keyblade threatening at Xaldin.

"We just have to find out," Xaldin said, sneering as he disappeared in another quick wisp.

"He went outside!" Aseles charged forward.

"After him!" Beast hurried behind as Aseles opened the door, Beast opening it widely for the others behind him. Outside in the stone courtyard Aseles caught a glimpse of the member running across, dashing toward the opened doors that led to the stone bridge outside near the black gates.

"Look, it's the rose!" Aseles skidded to a halt and shot her eyes up toward the high balconies above, seeing Belle adorned in her blue outfit. In her arms she embraced the glass vase with the rose still attached in the center of it. Suddenly Xaldin appeared behind her, grabbing her around the face and placing his gloved hand over her mouth. She struggled as the group watched dreadfully.

"Belle!" Beast cried out as Xaldin jumped to the edge, and then lashed forward toward the end of the bridge. As the group hurried to advance, Xaldin stood with Belle, his palm still gripping her mouth, though the vase of the rose was gripped in one arm. He held both the rose and Belle tightly, his dark eyes lingering to look at Beast as Beast made his way to the center of the rock bridge, the rest right behind him.

"Get out of my castle now!" Beast yelled with a roar.

"With pleasure, but I might want to travel light....Dear, what should I leave behind?" Xaldin hummed for a moment, "Should I leave Belle, or the rose?"

"Belle!" Beast yelled out as he started to run to her and Xaldin.

"Argh!" Belle suddenly jabbed Xaldin unexpectedly at the center of his throat with her elbow. Xaldin grunted and she quickly slipped the rose out of his possession. She sprinted forward, passing the rest charging to cover her.

"Good one, Belle!" Sora said as she was now running to the safety of the castle, the doors opening as Lumiere and Cogsworth closed them right behind her. Beast was now in front of Xaldin and swung his arm. Xaldin jumped back in time, his back pressed against the black gates at the end with a gloved hand gripping his throat. He growled angrily as the rest stood in front of him a good few yards away, weapons drawn out.

Xaldin picked up his head as he thrust his arms upward above his head, causing pools of blackened tornadoes to form around him. His dreadlocks spun wildly about him as the group readied themselves for his approach. He then threw his arms down as spears appeared from the swirling tornadoes, the strong gusts of wind now encircling themselves around the Organization member. He held three spears in hand, leaving the rest to circle around him. His eyes shot toward the group as Aseles slightly froze, but gritted her teeth as the blood ran hurriedly in her skin.

"You might have taken down Demyx easily, but you are no match for me!" Xaldin fumed.

Beast charged forward Xaldin, and with a swift move, Xaldin threw his spear at him. Beast dodged in time but he was soon kicked, flying backwards passing the four. Sora charged this time, along with Donald and Goofy, Aseles following right behind. Xaldin commanded his spears to rise in the air, and then shot forward with precision. Aseles swung her keyblade in front, dodging two sharp ends while Goofy was sent flying back, his shield sparking against three. Donald ducked to the coming one he had while Sora glided easily across the floor.

"Sora!" Donald shouted. Aseles shot her eyes up to see that the spears had appeared themselves around the wielder, spinning rapidly around him as they shot in random directions, trapping Sora in the middle. He deflected several, but was not hasty enough to dodge two, one cutting across his cheek and the other along his leg. He stumbled forward as the spears drew back, though they

mounted upwards to cascade Sora in a whirlpool of deadly ends.

“AH!” Sora hissed under his breath, picking himself up to stand correctly and face Xaldin who appeared in front of him.

“You die!” Xaldin shot forward.

“Take this!” Donald spun a bolt of lightning forward, catching Xaldin’s shoulder. Xaldin grunted as Aseles followed in suite, throwing a burst of fire toward Xaldin, making him back up as the flames engorged all around him. He suddenly disappeared as the flames died.

“Sora!” Aseles hurried to him as Donald followed.

“I’ll heal you!” Donald nodded quickly, “Heal-“

“Watch out!” Goofy shouted. Aseles swiftly glided in front of Sora and Donald, keyblade pressing against the sharpened ends that turned themselves into one, single lance.

“Give me a challenge to work with!” Xaldin taunted. Aseles grunted and shot her keyblade across, making the lances go limp in formation. She dashed through them and began to strike against Xaldin, but he dodged every move, two lances back in his possession as he swung them accordingly against her.

Suddenly he ducked as she was thrown back, a spear scratching against both your upper shoulders. Aseles flew back as she crashed against the ground, grunting with Goofy hurrying to her side. Beast charged forward, passing as he clawed and swung against Xaldin.

“So naïve,” Xaldin sneered. He crossed his lances in possession in front, the Beast roaring as he stumbled back, the cuts traveling across his chest. Before anyone could guess, the spears appeared and began to whirlwind themselves around Beast, the cuts gashing across his fur as he roared in agony.

“Stop!” Aseles shouted as Goofy went forward, sending his shield spinning with a yellow glow. Xaldin shot his head around, deflecting the shield completely and making it jump into the air.

“Fools!” Xaldin withdrew a spear and tossed it forward. Goofy ducked, but the back of his shirt was caught, sending him flying and pinned against the stone floor.

“Goofy!” Donald shouted as he came next, throwing a Gravity spell against Xaldin. The lances froze as the healed Sora came rushing forward, striking powerfully against Xaldin who stumbled back from the oncoming blows.

“You’ll have to do better!” Xaldin suddenly tossed his arms up, the winds blowing around him. Sora continued to strike against him, but before anyone could warn him, the spears appeared from below Sora, piercing across his skin and sending him upwards in a spiral of attacks. In a quick flash, Sora was on the ground, grunting as he tried to stand up. Xaldin stood over him, “You shall end by my lance!”

“No you don’t!” Donald came next, swinging his wand. Xaldin suddenly grabbed him by the throat, tossing him overhead as Donald yelled, hitting the top of a nearby statue that stood on the rim of the bridge. Xaldin slowly turned his way toward Aseles, and began to walk. Her eyes widened, seeing she was the only person standing at this point.

“Only seems I have one left to deal with,” Xaldin grinned. Aseles readied herself, watching the lances intently as they spun in a tornado. They shot forward as she dodge-rolled to the side, deflecting the coming ends as Xaldin continued to be persistent in his attacks, “Can you do

anything else, but dodge?"

"Watch!" Aseles swung her keyblade up, spinning it as a ring of flame began to propel itself over her head. Xaldin yelled as his cloak hissed from the burns. The flames continued to go round and round as she stood, charging forward. Suddenly the end of her keyblade was stopped as the lances held it firmly, the flames instantly dying.

Aseles tried to pull her keyblade away, but instantly she turned, only to meet the piercing lances coming mercilessly against her. She screamed as she tried to knock them off, but it was as if Xaldin had trapped her inside an angry wasp nest, the stings on her skin roaring and scorching.

The seconds were too slow as she endured nothing but agony from the piercing, sharp ends of the lances, finally meeting the ground face first. She could taste the blood in her mouth as she shuddered uncomfortably, groaning. Her body was lifted with a lance lifting the front of her shirt, almost tearing through it as Xaldin watched her with mirth. Was...was this it?

"You are finished," Xaldin growled.

*Why do you continue to have a traitor among you?*

*She is of no value to you, but to us.*

*She is of our kind.*

*Join us Aseles.*

Aseles felt so cold...and yet... this burning desire, it began to consume her being, her whole body, making it rot and gorge in something powerful. Her hands felt numb, but she could not feel anything, or see anything. It was...as if she were sleeping.

*...Sora.....*

*Organization XIII.....*

*.....keyblade..*

*.. your fault.....your fault.....*

"Aseles, open your eyes."

Aseles could feel her eyes flicker, but still, she could not see a thing. Had she gone blind? It was...Sora. It sounded like him.

"...What?" Aseles groaned, feeling herself stumble, a pair of arms holding her up. "W-where am I?"

"You don't remember?" Sora asked. Finally she could see the focus of light enter her pupils.

"Remember what?" she groaned. What was he talking about?

Aseles's vision became clear as she looked about, finding Sora was in front of her, with Goofy beside her and holding her up. Donald was beside Beast, the two looking over to her direction. Aseles blinked rapidly, shaking her head.

Then they widened as she quickly looked around, "Xaldin!" Her keyblade reacted into view as she stood at the ready, but no one else seemed to be alarmed as her. Wait...the battle was over?

“...You...don’t remember,” Sora blinked slowly, slightly hesitant.

“What did....I do?” Aseles asked. She saw everyone shift and then she slowly turned behind. Her eyes shot open as she stumbled back, finding Xaldin’s lifeless body at the center of the bridge, dark wisps of air circling his body. His cloak had been shredded with his hair over his face, and his mouth seemed agape. This sinister feeling around him...was not coming from him.

Aseles’s hands shook and the keyblade glimmered on sight. She swiftly let go of it and let it clatter to the ground, shooting herself back with Goofy’s arms letting her go.

“Noo! No no no no!” she gripped the sides of her head, kneeling to the ground. “No no no no! NO!”

“Hey, hey!” Sora rushed forward, kneeling in front of her as he held onto her shoulders, “You have to calm down! It’s alright!”

“No, I don’t want the keyblade anymore! I don’t want to!” Aseles shook her head, trembling as her lips began to quiver, “I killed him! I killed him!” Sora’s hands reached up as they held the sides of her face, making her look up to him.

They were the upmost sincere as he shook his own head, “Aseles! It’s alright....it’s alright. You need to calm down. Do you understand?”

“B-But...” Aseles gritted her teeth, shutting her eyes tightly.

“If it wasn’t him....it would’ve been us,” Sora replied gently.

“What did I do? What did I do?!” she asked desperately, gripping onto Sora’s arms. “How did I-I...nooo...”

“It’s going to be alright. You’re badly injured, so Donald is going to heal you, alright?” Sora replied softly. Aseles looked to him, but slapped her hands to her face, rubbing it roughly. Donald came from beside as Sora walked away.

“C’mom Goofy, I need to seal the keyhole before we leave,” Sora replied somewhere in front.

“Alright,” Goofy nodded, following behind him it sounded.

Donald held onto Aseles’s shoulder, “Heal.” The outlining of her body began to radiate green. She hunched her head gently as Donald rubbed her back, kneeling next to her, “Let’s go, Aseles,” Donald replied. “We’re going to stop by Twilight Town. You need to speak with Yen Sid.”

Aseles lifted her trembling face up to him, “Yen...Sid?”

Donald nodded, “It’s about time he helped you.”



## Secrets

The group had arrived in the Train Station of Twilight Town, but seemed to be waiting for something in the said station.

Aseles sat on the brick, tan floor, hugging her knees with Goofy sitting right beside her, his palm rubbing her back reassuringly. The trip here seemed eerily awkward; would it be worth it to talk to this...Yen Sid? What could he possibly do to help Aseles that was something inside her, untamed and raw?

“Don’t be so sad, Aseles. Yen Sid will help you out,” Goofy smiled slightly, patting her shoulder blade. Aseles stayed quiet as she looked at the railing of the trams, each one going in and out of the city with several visitors and civilians. For a moment she thought she would happen to catch Hayner and the gang, but was disappointed with unrecognizable faces.

Donald appeared in front as Aseles looked up to him, seeing he was signaling her to get up. She did so as Sora appeared beside him, though he looked behind him to see a tram approaching. Aseles watched his gaze and caught an unfamiliar, lavender colored tram heading to a rest nearby. She looked at it, puzzled of its odd color, but figured this was the one to take them to Yen Sid.

“You ready?” Sora asked. Aseles looked to him and nodded. As much as it made her wonder what she was getting herself into, it was worth a shot to talk to this said man. By the way Donald addressed him, Yen Sid seemed very respected and high in status, which made the situation more grave.

Donald stepped into the opening tram as Sora followed. Goofy led Aseles in front of him as she boarded on, hesitating to sit down, but did so on the leather seats. She reached a hand up to rub the side of her cheek, looking ahead to see Donald sitting across from her with Sora leaning against the closing door and looking out. The tram moved as Aseles jumped, but Goofy held her shoulder reassuringly, patting her back once more.

The tram continued forth and out of the station and tunnel, but just when she thought it would lead out to the sun, the windows rattled slightly and there was a bright flash of light blinding her instantly. Aseles blinked rapidly and rubbed her eyes, looking again to see that she was now....phasing through space. What?

Sitting up straighter, she turned in her seat to look out the windows behind Goofy, seeing the purple and green milky ways twirling and tangling themselves with the flaming stars outside. The tram rocketed and rolled gently across the open space, Aseles almost questioning whether they were going in the right direction or not.

A few moments passed with no words exchanged, and the tram stopped. Aseles looked to the door to see Sora the first one out, followed by Goofy who led her by the hand outside. Aseles stumbled a bit as she walked out, bewildered to find her feet touching grass on a floating piece of land. Ahead of the grassy meadow were several bushes lining up in curves to a large tower up in front, its heads swerving and jerking upwards. If it was this big outside, Aseles could only wonder what was inside.

The trio began to walk ahead with Goofy continuing to lead Aseles, and just before she could regret the visit chance, the tram was suddenly gone in a blink behind them. Well...no use going back.

Up the stone steps Sora led to the large double doors, and they opened at their arrival as Aseles

saw a neat room with a curving staircase above her head when she stepped inside. She blinked to it, and then watched as Sora headed to the beginning steps at the left. Aseles gulped as Sora waited for her to follow. Up they continued through, but just when she thought she reached the doors, she only found a continuous set of staircases heading up after every room they entered. It seemed never-ending, and she could feel the burn in her thighs as she progressed upwards still. It seemed they had finally reached the end when the three guys turned, making Aseles halt in place. She blinked to them as Donald opened the doors, followed in by Goofy. Sora turned to look at Aseles with a stern face.

“Wait right here,” he advised. Aseles took a step down, but nodded. Sora nodded back once as he headed inside the doors, and closed them with a thud. Aseles hurried to stand up, kneeling before the hard doors and pressed her ear against the wooden surface of it. Squinting her eyes, she found that she could not hear anything coherent and merely sat down on the top step with her elbows on her knees.

As the moments ticked by, Aseles couldn't help but feel guilty that she had brought this whole thing up. She could only wonder if traveling with these guys would be a good idea, but the more she traveled, the more it didn't make sense of what was going on. Nothing was leading to anything of her past life. The only thing that made sense was to stop Organization XIII, but the idea of killing them off seemed so senseless, that Aseles felt ashamed she had killed someone like Demyx. If they were willing to die for their cause...what could possibly be done to stop them? Was Kingdom Hearts that important? What lay before it?

Aseles abruptly heard the door creak open as she swiftly stood up. She looked around the door to see Sora there, and signaling her to come inside. She bit her tongue and forced herself in, and she blinked among the room as its left side, seeing a few books on shelves with a long table settled near the wall. To the middle was a large wooden table, an antiquity that was adorned with detailed decorations and a large book settled at its edge. Behind it sat a man in blue robes, with a large hat and a long, snowy beard. His black beady eyes locked onto Aseles's, and she instantly felt vulnerable to his presence. She could see why Donald seemed to respect him so. His stare almost made the room spin.

"I presume you are Aseles," he began, his hands folded on top of his brown wooden desk. She nodded nervously. "I've heard several things about you from His Majesty. Now I've heard from your friends that stand before me. What is it that you want resolved?"

Well.....a brave way to start. His attitude seemed really stern and proper...making her less secure every passing second. What could she possibly say? Don't say anything stupid, don't say anything stupid.

“Umm...who are you?”

“I am Yen Sid,” he said. Cue the facepalm. Of course he was! He was the only one here who she didn't know. "Now, what is it that you want?"

"I'm.....not sure, exactly." Okaaaay, this was not going welllll.

"There is something brewing inside you...I can sense it...and it is very powerful and unrestrained..." Yen Sid narrowed his eyes. Aseles fidgeted in place, gripping her wrist and dropping her eyes to the ground. "Tell me about yourself. Your friends want to help you," Yen Sid started once more.

"Well....it looks like you probably know more about me than I do," Aseles said.

"Tell me what I might not know." Yes, because that helped a ton.

Aseles gathered her thoughts, and bit her tongue, "...Organization XIII...Namine... Roxas."

"Roxas?" Yen Sid asked, his eyes the searching into her eyes.

"He's-" Aseles stopped for a moment. It was better now than later. Yen Sid raised his eyebrows at her as she continued, "Roxas is Sora's Nobody." Considering there was tensed silence, it was not the *best* thing to start with.

"Sora's Nobody you say?" Yen Sid stated again. She gave a nod. "What else don't I know?" Great. Might as well...spill it all out.

"Organization XIII....they keep trying to recruit me....I guess you can say that. They have ways of contacting me, but it's mostly unintended in my part," Aseles replied sternly. "I don't know what they want from me...honestly. Some girl named Namine is the one that's causing these episodes, but she's not sure how to stop them. She gave me options...but they didn't sound good to me."

The room suddenly grew awkward. Sora decided to interrupt it....great.

"How-Why haven't you told us!?" he asked, abruptly taking a place beside her. Aseles turned to him. So much for making him feel better, Sora's face seemed completely shattered of everything she had been keeping...and she really couldn't blame him.

"Sora," Yen Sid said, raising his palm gently. Sora glared at him, then at Aseles. Aseles actually shivered from that stare, but amazingly, as if Yen Sid consoled his emotions, Sora backed away. "How long have you known this?" Yen Sid turned to look at you.

"Since....I've gotten the keyblade, I guess," Aseles said. Yeah...she met Roxas when she first arrived to Hollow Bastion...it would be considered the first time she got it.

"Please, call forth your keyblade," Yen Sid replied. Aseles walked up to stand in front of his desk, and held out her palm. Her keyblade blew her bangs from her face as she then settled it in front of Yen Sid, her hand still on the handle, unsure if she should let go.

Yen Sid peered over, slightly hunching as he brushed his beard in thought, his beady, black eyes rolling up the neck, then back down to where her fingers lay. After a few still minutes of insecurity, he picked up his head and looked to Aseles, making her stone....almost.

"Hmmm, it seems your keyblade is somehow...growing as you trek through your adventures, and it, indeed, connects you to Organization XIII."

"How?" Aseles raised a demanding brow.

"I am.....not quite sure," he replied, quite lost within himself, and what he was telling her made her uneasy, baffled slightly to find that even such a wise wizard as himself could not figure out what sorcery was tying her with the gang.

"What do you....propose I do?" For a minute, she somehow could sense him ready to tell her to give up the keyblade.

"It will be something you will have to find out on your own....taking into consideration that you have also tied yourself to this keyblade and it's....unusual properties." Yen Sid inhaled deeply, "Whatever it is that is lingering deep inside you, it will not let go unless you abandon this weapon."

"Would you think....those States have something to do....with the mental images I'm getting?" Aseles asked. "When I mean states....I mean...my....transformations..."

Yen Sid folded his hands on the table, his eyes locked to hers, "I cannot answer that question, but it seems that you now possess a threat to this Organization; despite their efforts to console you to join them, the events happening are not in their favor. As long as you continue to wield this weapon, then unfortunate events will continue to be bestowed upon you, and others who are around you."

Aseles winced slightly from the last sentence, knowing full well that it involved Sora, Donald and Goofy. Could she really put them in harm's way?

"However...." Yen Sid raised a hand, calling her attention, "As long as you trust your friends greatly, and give them no reason to suspect you of anything, then you are truly in the hands of protection, for only you, Aseles, can prevent such horrible events from happening. Do I make myself clear?" Basically.....don't lie. Yeah, pretty much what he said.

Aseles sighed again, but nodded, "Yes, I understand."

"Then I believe I have done all I could," he replied with a nod as well, turning to look at Sora, Donald and Goofy. "May you be careful on your journey. This evil power will not stop unless you interfere."

"We'll do our best," Goofy saluted as Sora and Donald nodded. Yen Sid turned to Aseles, and she gave a weak, two-finger salute, dropping her gaze.

"Very well, off you go," Yen Sid replied. A large book sprouted in front of him as he began to read, as the rest were hurried out by Donald who did not want to interrupt Yen Sid's reading time.

As Aseles began to walk down the stairs, taking two steps at a time, she looked back to see all three....with their eyes on her. She bit her tongue as she looked away, and led the way all the way down in tense silence. She knew when she reached the doors, she would be hearing from them. And not a moment after she opened the doors to head out, Sora was right behind, opening the door wider as she stumbled onto the grass, and shot her eyes back to see him almost fuming.

"What else have you been keeping from us?!" he shot out, his azure eyes blazing bright.

"There's nothing else," Aseles replied flatly..

"What about the.....Roxas? Who is Roxas?" Sora snapped again, taking a step forward, making Aseles take one back.

"Your Nobody...it seems," Donald crossed his arms, looking ill to Aseles. Aseles dropped her shoulders slightly, feeling ultimately attacked, and had no way to stop it.

"What else are you keeping from us?" Sora demanded, stomping a foot forward with his hands in fists.

"Look, I'm sorry, alright? I'm sorry that I've been keeping this from you and not telling you! I'm just sorry," Aseles replied, exasperated. She opened her mouth again, but nothing would come out. What else was there to say?

Aseles looked away as she faced them in profile, with her teeth grinding each other in frustration, and annoyance, but not because of their persistence, but because she had kept all of it from them; the guys who accepted her on the trip, who had full trust in her when she was welcomed to go on board....the guilt of not telling them everything was now hitting her, and how...it hurt so much.

Aseles could only wonder...what would've happened...if she had never met them, if she had never

met Sora in those moments in Hollow Bastion. She was trapped in this world, in this world full of enemies and lies, with people and hearts in the balance of it all, how much could Organization XIII progress with their plans that they have already not achieved? It somehow felt...odd, but it seemed that even this, even the fighting between the four of them was of their bidding; to tear them apart, and confound Aseles in every turn.

"Why..." she questioned, the edges of her eyes gleaming in distraught. Her nails dug into her palms, her teeth gritting against each other, "why.....did it choose me?"

Aseles wasn't expecting an answer, but Sora suddenly appeared in front of her. Aseles picked her head up, but quickly looked away from his gaze. His hands traveled up to grip her shoulders, and he gave Aseles a firm squeeze, his chest exhaling.

"Because.....there are people worth fighting for..." Sora replied. Aseles's eyes shot to him, seeing them vibrant.

Aseles shook her head, dropping it to stare at the ground again, "...I shouldn't be fighting with you guys then...not like this."

"What do you mean?" Sora asked.

"All I've been doing is lying to you guys...and you still want me around?" Aseles replied, having to push the words out of her mouth.

"We couldn't leave you behind," Donald said next, coming beside and looking up to her. Really? Could they be this forgiving?

"Yeah, all for one and one for all!" Goofy said, giving a thumbs up.

"You....you can't be serious," Aseles struggled once more to say.

"Why would we leave you? You're our friend," Sora smiled wider. Goofy nodded along with Donald. This was....unbelievable. "And we won't let anything happen to you."

Aseles exhaled gently, but gave a determined stare, "Then I'll be there...to protect you guys as well."

FFW:

"Hey, not to be mean about your driving, but are you sure we're supposed to be here?" Sora asked with arms crossed.

"Yes-Hey!" Donald snapped, staring at Sora with a twitching eye. Sora held his hands up in defense as he led the way forward, Goofy and Aseles following with a fuming Donald behind.

They had seemed to be in Port Royal once more, the empty cells at the side with the loaded cannons at their right. Sora led the way down the stairs as the place was beyond its night, absolutely no one outside. The moon hung out in the sky, with thin clouds wavering among it. However, the peace was interrupted as Aseles's eyes darted ahead, spotting a whole group of Nobodies heading their way. Sora, Donald and Goofy followed her gaze, and they immediately took their weapons out as Aseles copied.

"What are they doing here?" Donald asked.

"Only one way to find out," Sora said. Behind the group of Nobodies was an Organization XIII member, heading through the dock. The others followed with their weapons out. Aseles stopped

in her tracks as she faced the Nobodies. The Nobodies cut apart, and let the high ranked Nobody stand in front.

He chuckled slightly as he looked upon the rest, suddenly the sound of running footsteps coming from the bridge, with Jack Sparrow arriving with sword in hand.

"Jack!" Sora called out with Donald and Goofy.

"Aye! Zora and his friends!" Jack greeted.

"....Sora, it's Sora," Sora replied with a flat expression.

"Why are you here?!" Donald yelled toward the Organization member.

"To collect hearts of course," the member answered simply in a British accent.

"Hearts?" Jack whispered, seeming slightly confused.

"Yes, hearts. The more we collect hearts, the more we complete Kingdom Hearts. You see, the more you use that keyblade, the more you help us in our demands," the member said.

.....They had to be kidding. He just gave that information up? Just like that? No....there had to be-

"What!?" Sora whispered, looking at his keyblade, "No! You're-" Oh....JEEZ.

"That's right, we need you Sora, give us what we want. Kill more Heartless, that's what you're destined to do." Aseles's eyes looked to Sora, whose eyes had dropped down to stare at the ground, his face completely broken and distraught. His keyblade hung limp in his hand as Goofy looked toward him as well, the set of worry running across his face. Sora seemed...completely dumbfounded...as if all the happiness was sucked out of his body.

It seemed...the male had achieved the impossible....Sora looked as if.....he lost his will to fight, his light in the darkness.

The member chuckled, "What's wrong, Roxas? Are you afraid to use the keyblade now?" the member asked, heading down the pier. Now he was taunting.

"Oh no you don't!" Aseles glared and ran toward his direction.

"Aseles!" Donald yelled after her. Aseles slipped across the Nobodies easily, swinging her keyblade as she approached the member. He turned as she struck, only to find that she cut across the air. She grunted as she was gripped from the back of her neck, being slammed to the ground. She winced, flailing to strike behind her to get the figure off of her.

"Rash as always. So predictable....made my mission that much easier," he said. Aseles growled, but she shouted from the kick behind her head, knocking her out.

SORA'S POV:

"Sora! He's getting away!" Donald snapped angrily the moment the Nobodies were defeated, with Sora hardly picking up his keyblade for the battle.

"We have to rescue her lad, if you didn't understand what the duck said," Jack said, placing his sword away.

"I was...helping them....all along. I didn't even know it! How am I supposed to use the keyblade

now?" Sora whispered angrily, gripping his head with both of his hands.

"Sora, I think you're supposed to use it, no matter what," Goofy said, coming beside him and patting his on the back.

"Organization XIII?" All of them turned to see Will and Elizabeth running toward them from the town.

"What's going on?" Will asked, "Where did that cloaked man go?"

"He took the lovely dear girl with him, I suppose," Jack said.

"What, we have to go!" Elizabeth answered.

"What's the use...?" Sora said suddenly, making everyone look at him. He pressed his hands to his face, groaning slightly.

"Huh?" Goofy asked, "Sora....that's not you."

"I can't use the keyblade; it'll only help the Organization...." Sora whispered again, facing away with his arms hanging at his sides in defeat.

"Don't you care about that girl then?" Jack asked. Sora turned his head to him.

"Of course I do! But-" Sora cut off, his eyes looking at the floor.

"We have to keep fighting Heartless and the Organization no matter what, Sora" Donald said, "Who else will?" Sora did not bother to look up, because he knew Donald was right. His stomach did flips and twists, and his own heart was racing as if it had just run a month marathon.

"You're right...." Sora answered in defeat, "Let's go rescue Aseles."

NORMAL POV:

The floor seemed to rock back and forth as Aseles flickered her eyes open, almost tipping over until the side of her head banged against the hard wood of a shelf. She hissed as she sat up straight, and nearly doubled over to find an Organization XIII member kneeling before her, with the tips of his boots against the ground, and his knees bent in front of him. The strands of red, scorching hair rolled out from the sides, his mouth visible with his nose and the rest of his face shrouded in darkness. Aseles tried to stand, but to her ultimate dismay, her wrists and ankles were bound.

Aseles winced as she looked up past her bangs, watching Axel intently as he continued to loom over her, his mouth in a firm line.

"Luxord is never careful..." he replied flatly.

"Lux-ord?" she questioned. It must be the other member that literally stepped on her head...because seriously...her skull was crying out every time it rolled against the wall. Aseles's legs rolled against the ground as well, but she stilled them, finding her lower back completely sore. She must've been...knocked out for a while it seemed.

"There's no use running, Aseles. You've lost," Axel replied sternly. Just when she thought his jokes and games were insulting.....his serious tone was just.....unbearable to listen to.

"Why....why am I here?" she replied roughly.

"We're delivering you to Xemnas," Axel replied. Well...that news was not reassuring. Could it be...of the connection she had with the keyblade? Considering Luxord just basically was able to shut down Sora....was there something dreadful awaiting Aseles with Xemnas, the leader of the Organization?? "My attempts to kill you have been halted, but our recruiting attempts have also been called down."

"Then...." Aseles blinked, knowing it was completely stupid to ask...but it seemed Axel seemed to have read her mind, "Where is Kairi...?"

He stood up as he showed her his back, his boots groaning against the wooden, creaking floor, "She's safe."

"Why did you take her?" Aseles persisted, grunting slightly. "Axel....what are you going to do?"

"...I don't hate you," Axel suddenly replied, his eyes darting to the side. Where did...that come from?

"Axel, please, you have to let me go," Aseles struggled. "You need to take Kairi back...to where she was."

"Or you'll do what?" Axel shot around, looking at Aseles firmly from underneath his hood.

"He cares about her....you have to take her back," Aseles replied.

"It's true...." Axel's mouth widened a bit, making Aseles stop squirming. "...You like Sora."

Aseles's mouth dropped, and she furiously shook her head, "N-No! I do not! You have to let me go! Please...." Axel said nothing, and headed toward the doors, and closed them with a thud, leaving a baffled Aseles against the wall.

SORA'S POV:

"Where is Aseles, Jack?"

"Who knows where she might be at the moment."

"Well, we'll have to take a guess."

"Are you sure that's wise, boy?" Jack asked flatly. Sora stopped. Was it wise to take a guess? Probably not. What if the Black Pearl were to go in the wrong direction? Her conditions were unsure of...who knew what that Organization member was planning to do with her.

"No," Sora sighed, his face looking at the side of the ship. Jack stood next to him, his back to the railing and his arms crossed. How could he have been so blind as to help that group? So stupid? He didn't even have the courage to rescue Aseles from that Organization XIII member.

So stupid, so selfish...

All Sora hoped was that Aseles was alright. But in his conscience, he knew something was very wrong.....doubt was knocking at his front door.

ASELES'S POV:

Any attempts to flee were shrugged off, seeing that the binds among her were simply too tight to loosen; also, her body was preferring that she stay sitting down, considering that Luxord's kick to the head was flattering in making the room spin when she sat up correctly. To further frustrate her,



her keyblade was in no help on cutting the binds off if she couldn't even direct the head of it toward her position.

The time was passing, but it almost felt like hours as Aseles continued to drift in and out of sleep. One minute she was in the cabin and the next she was sitting in that marble, white room, the ceilings of brown and white almost mixing together. She could feel someone trying to shake her awake on the other end, but it seemed that Namine could not pull her in further than she already was. Was...she trying to warn her about something?

Aseles felt herself unexpectedly lifted off the ground, her feet dragging on the floor as she flickered her eyes madly to regain conscious. She could feel a pair of hefty hands underneath her arms, pulling her back as the chains among her feet clanged against the wooden floor, and against the soggy deck. The air was cold as the scene was dark, no doubt being night.

Aseles looked among the ship, and then she grunted loudly, dropped onto the floor. She groaned as she looked about the opened sails above and the passing stars over them. Her eyes rotated around the deck as she tried to sit up, but was only able to lie on her side and look up to a man of blond, trimmed hair, and a goatee. He had several earrings attached, and his eyes were sharpened with mischievous intentions. He placed a foot on her side as she winced, feeling the loose rope against her wrists.

"It seems our little princess has woken up, eh?" Luxord sneered. Aseles grunted, trying to squirm him off, but to no avail.

"Xemnas wants her unharmed, Luxord," Axel replied from the side.

Aseles's eyes shot to him, seeing several Nobodies had surrounded the deck of the ship. They were oddly shaped, thin and tuned in the color pink. They held opened, large sleeves at the ends of their arms, with three sharp, lavender needles among their heads. It seemed they wore a single outfit, wrapping around their wavering bodies and down to their large ankles and black, single-spiked feet. They didn't seem to possess any type of face.

"Let me go!" Aseles snapped, wriggling her arms behind as she turned to lie on her back. She could feel something loosening, and she rapidly began to maneuver her fingers about.

"Aseles!" Aseles's eyes flew open, but she was gripped from the back of her shirt, hauled up and literally picked up, her feet hovering over the floor. She winced as she wriggled in place. She looked ahead, past the railing to see a ship had set itself beside the ship she was on. On the deck, running to the other railing was Sora, Donald and Goofy, accompanied by Will and Elizabeth. Her eyes shot up toward Jack who was walking down the steps from the wheel of the ship.

"Give Aseles to us!" Donald yelled toward Luxord.

"That deal cannot be granted," Luxord answered firmly.

"Why you!" Sora said, taking out his keyblade. Luxord wagged his finger. He suddenly snapped his fingers, and a suddenly spur of darkness formed in front of Sora. Sora immediately withdrew as did the rest, and there stood a feeble little Heartless, squirming among the deck. Sora immediately stopped in his tracks, his hand trembling at the grip of his keyblade. Sora did not move, nor did he dare.

"Your heart is too good now," Luxord's lips curled up wickedly.

"Come on, Sora!" Goofy urged, but Sora's eyes did not falter from staring at the Heartless that was merely looking at him, its antennas wiggling on its head.

"Let me go!" Aseles kicked violently.

"Stow your mouth!" Luxord growled toward her. Aseles glared to him, and suddenly her face was gripped, making her wince. She froze as her eyes widened, seeing Luxord's face hover over her, "I will see it fit that Xemnas rids you of existence."

"We'll see about that!" Aseles's hands snapped out of their binds and she swung about, attacking her keyblade full circle. Luxord and Axel quickly backed up, but the Nobodies in their control charged forward. Aseles swung to the right, but she was too slow from the left side. She was thrown onto the ground, grunting as she shot her keyblade up.

"FIRE!" A blaze of flames sprouted heavily among the air, the Nobodies quickly blocking the attack and dodging. The flames suddenly snuffed out as Aseles stared, seeing Axel had taken control of the flames with his Chakram, slicing the air in front. Aseles was gripped from the front as she yelped, her keyblade kicked off to the side and hitting against the deck.

"Let go! Let go!" Aseles cried out. There was a flash of light, and suddenly the group consisting of Sora, Donald, Goofy and Jack flew themselves over on the deck. Aseles's eyes widened, but she was swiftly turned, her back pressed against Axel's chest. She squirmed, but halted once the spike of one of his Chakrams rested at the center of her throat. She gulped, feeling the tip sting against her flesh.

"Not another step," Luxord warned. Sora and the rest froze on their tracks as Axel narrowed his eyes to them, his grip on his weapon tight.

"What is it that you want?" Sora called out, his keyblade shaking with rage.

"Do you recognize this?" Luxord held up two of his fingers, holding something that glittered in the moonlight. Aseles squinted her eyes, and then froze to see it was a medallion, the same ones that had been thrown over the deck in their last visit. How in the world did he manage to get that out?

"The medallion? How'd you get that?" Jack asked. It wasn't a second later when the moonlight hit Jack; his skin lightened to an invisible coat, and within Aseles could see the real form of bony fingers. Jack shook his hand, but it was no doubt that the curse had laid upon him yet again.

"We'll be taking them back!" Donald huffed, pointing his wand.

"Surely, I don't believe that is all you're here for...." Luxord sneered.

"We've come here to stop you!" Sora shot his keyblade upward, pointing it toward Luxord.

"Parley," Luxord said.

"Huh?" Goofy asked.

"Parley," Luxord repeated.

"Fine then, out with it," Jack said firmly. Wait...the heck just happened?! Parley?? What?!

"I'll surrender the chest, but I want something in return," Luxord started, "I keep some memories, and I keep the girl..."

"No way!" Sora said.

"What a shame..." Luxord snapped his fingers. Suddenly the four Nobodies before appeared.

Luxord's hand suddenly helped four medallions in possession, and tossed the coins upward into the air. Almost rehearsed, the Nobodies flew to one each, and began to shoot themselves off in a nearby island off the bow of the ship.

"A dirty trick!" Sora growled. Axel suddenly crushed Aseles's ribs against him, making her grunt. He jumped upward into the air, clearing the group below as Luxord copied, but instead threw several large cards at the four. Goofy immediately stood in front and held his shield, deflecting the cutting cards from the trio behind him. Axel landed onto the deck of the Pearl as Luxord landed on the railing of it.

"But since the Pearl is the fastest ship so far, then I might as well toy with it," Luxord shot his arm forward. Several Nobodies shot from behind the group, throwing their bodies up to settle the carried, Aztec chest onto the deck of the ship. Elizabeth and Will were quickly bound and moved toward the cabin.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" Axel asked.

"Oh yes," Luxord smirked, and shot his arms forward. The Nobodies shot forward, moving their arms toward the cannons.

Aseles's eyes widened, "NO!!"

"Fire." The cannons shot out massively, striking against the right side of the opposite ship. The smoke pumped upwards and all across the Pearl's deck. Aseles fought vigorously, and her eyes shot blood red as she yelled in rage. Axel had let go of her, and Aseles quickly swung around, slamming her keyblade right at his chest and sending him crashing against the ground.

She yelled when she felt the back of her hair gripped, and she slammed her keyblade over her shoulder, "THUNDER!" Luxord yelled as the grip on her tightened, and he threw her across the blinding gray smoke. However, Aseles screamed as she found herself falling into the orange lit sea, the cold sensation of the water taking her by surprised as she kicked upward, and kicked vigorously to keep her afloat.

Aseles coughed as she looked around the debris of the ship, but found nothing but large rumble of woods, ropes, and the bottom half of the ship beginning to sink down.

"Retrieve her!" Aseles shot her eyes up, seeing Axel suddenly jumping over the railing, and landing a few feet from her. Aseles quickly shot around, and shut her eyes and she began to thrash wildly forward, grunting and wincing as the water burned into her eyes. She dared not to stop as her arms and lungs screamed, unknowing that the Black Pearl was now in the distance, with Axel having given up the chase to get her.

Aseles's face the surface of a dark fog, and she found herself stumbling onto the shallow water of the shore. She coughed as she began to hurriedly take cover within the fog, beginning to climb up the rocky ledge and cliff as she looked over, unknowing of Axel was still following her.

Finally, Aseles stopped as she reached the inside of a small cave, and she hugged the floor, curling her legs underneath her. She sniffed loudly as she slapped her hand to her eyes, punching the rock floor with her other free hand. Her body shook as the warm tears spilled over, unknowing if Sora and the others had lived that disastrous blow of cannon fire. Before Aseles could move any further, her eyes began to feel heavy, and she fell asleep in her heavy sobs.

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Aseles had woken up of surprise as she sat up, gripping her stomach tightly. She looked around to

see herself still on the wet floor of the small cave embedded in the cliff. She leisurely stood, grabbing onto the wall of support. She looked over the ledge, seeing the fog had settled, and the shore was calm. Aseles peered down, and began to climb down the cliff side, soon finding herself on the soft sand of the shore, taking calm, deep breaths, feeling her clothes stick to her skin.

Aseles gave a groan, remembering what had happened yesterday...was it yesterday? Aseles wasn't sure, feeling her whole body sore from the long swim. She proceeded to walk with caution as she began to come across the plain island, full of crevices of large caves and rock. Parts of ships were seen everywhere along the shore's floor, and Aseles couldn't help but feel this was some sort of Ship Graveyard.

After what seemed like an hour, Aseles rested her back against the rock wall, feeling completely drained of energy and her wet hair frizzing up from the fog. She rubbed her hands against her pants, and called forth her keyblade...but it did not come to hand. Aseles blinked rapidly, and opened her fingers wider, but the keyblade was not making an appearance.

"Shoot," Aseles hissed, rubbing her face as she looked at the ground. Suddenly, her eyes caught something at the corner of her view, and she looked to see a sly figure in the shadows. Squinting her eyes, the moving, graceful Nobody slithered into view, with a medallion in its grasp....

Aseles swiftly pinned herself against the rock wall, hiding within a tight spot as she peeked her head out, watching the Nobody come into view. It stopped, and Aseles quickly ducked her head back. However, from the shadow of it...it was not moving. It knew she was there.....

Aseles swallowed roughly, and she slowly began to step out. The Nobody turned its blank face to her direction, its sheet hands grabbing the medallion. Aseles waited patiently, and she began to take a step forward. This feeling surged within her body as she turned her hands into fists, her eyes slightly trembling the more she approached. Suddenly, the Nobody began to walk ahead, and it stopped right in front of Aseles as she stayed immobile on the spot.

Aseles slowly held out her hand, signaling the medallion in its hands. She waited as she curled her fingers, and suddenly...it obeyed as the Nobody settled the medallion in her palm. Aseles slowly began to back away as the Nobody suddenly turned to ash, sparkles falling to where it stood. That was.....weird.

Aseles held up the medallion in her palm, blinking, forgetting that when she had touched it, it had set a curse upon her. With that curse that much closer in mind though, Aseles pushed it into her pocket as she continued, walking in through another cave entrance.

Aseles found herself on the shore again, parts of ships embedded in the sandy surface. She stopped and squinted her eyes, seeing an object on the floor, unmoving and unconscious in the darkness of the night. Her eyes suddenly widened as she ran toward it, her arms frantically in front of her. She skidded to a stop and landed by Sora's unconscious body with his eyes closed. He was out cold.

Aseles grabbed a hold of Sora's stomach as she started to pull his feet out of the water, his shoes dripping of the sea. After a few yards, she turned Sora around, his face looking at the night sky.

"Sora!" she shook Sora's chest. She placed her ear against his chest: he wasn't breathing.

Aseles felt herself red in the face, but she quickly adjusted Sora, and tilted his head back with his mouth opened. Aseles inhaled a deep breath of air, and she pinched the opening of his nose, smashing her lips against his. She blew in the air into his lungs, and proceeded to push her hands vigorously against his chest in steady rhythm. He didn't budge. Aseles tried once more, feeling his wet lips cold as she blew into his lungs once more, thumping against his chest.

"C'mon!" Aseles inhaled once more, thrusting her hands against his chest, feeling the corner of her eyes wet. Sora suddenly coughed, and threw his head to the side, throwing up the water that was in his lung. His eyes flickered as Aseles breathed raggedly, rushing forward to wrap her arms around his head, cradling him in her arms. His eyes opened widely as his hand clutched forward, gripping her arm.

"Sora!" Aseles sniffed loudly, stroking his cheek as Sora looked up to her, his bright eyes looming along her face.

"Aseles! How did-where-" Sora started, breathing deeply as he sat up, "You....you saved me. OW!"

Aseles retracted her hand back, gritting her teeth as she gripped the front of his shirt, and shook it once, "Don't do that!! You scared the crap out of me!" Aseles rubbed her eyes off as Sora stared at her, blinking as he removed the water from his eyelashes. He reached forward as he wiped the tears from the corner of her eyes.

"I'm sorry...I didn't mean to scare you," he replied, reaching and pulling Aseles into a hug. She buried her face as she clutched the back of Sora's shirt, tugging it firmly in her grasp. "You're alright...you escaped the ship."

"Where are the others?" Aseles asked.

"I'm not sure...we better go look for them," Sora replied as Aseles parted, standing as she helped Sora to his feet. Sora looked to her as Aseles looked back, feeling the crease of her blush take hold of her expression. "Thank you...so much," Sora smiled, taking Aseles's face into his hands, stroking her chin tenderly.

"Oh!" Sora blinked as Aseles reached into her pocket, and held out the medallion for him to take, "Think you might need this."

"You got one!" Sora smiled widely, looking to her, "Nicely done." He pushed it into his pocket, "I'll hold onto it...just in case...you know..."

"Yeah, I totally agree," Aseles waved her hand dismissively. "Lead the way."

FFW:

The two walked among the wreckage on the shore, but no presence of another Nobody was on sight. Aseles was glad how Sora didn't ask how she got the first medallion, and she was deadly afraid if they ran into a second one, her keyblade wouldn't arrive again. She had not called it since, but decided to wait on what would happen when the moment arrived.

"Wonder when we'll be home," Sora asked.

Aseles looked at him, "What do you mean?"

"We're just....arriving to other worlds; you know.....just destroying Heartless and Organization XIII. When will it be time to get home with Kairi and Riku there too?" Sora asked.

"Uh...."

"You want to hear about it?" Aseles looked to him, but smiled with a nod. "We have this really great view of the ocean, and there's a ton of palms trees around. There's also this section of a small island, and then we have a hiding place, and some platforms," Sora smiled warmly, "Can't wait to go back there."

"It sounds like a home," Aseles nodded back, watching her step as she watched for loose boards among the sand.

Sora turned to look at her, "Aseles."

She turned to him, "What is it?"

"Haven't you been thinking?"

"Thinking of what?"

"About....a home? I mean..." Sora rubbed the back of his head.

Aseles looked to him, partially confused, "...Uh huh?"

"What if....I wanted to ask you if...you would like to come....home with me," Sora's cheeks flushed, his eyes looked ahead.

Aseles blinked rapidly, "...Your home?"

Sora looked to her, "Would you like to? The two of us can....hang out and..."

Before she could answer, Aseles heard steps in the cave up front. Sora stood in front of her, his keyblade in his hand, but he lowered it when he spotted Donald, Goofy, and Jack with their weapons out.

"Hey!" they all yelled to each other. Sora and Aseles ran in front of them.

"Well, looks like the lassy is alright," Jack said, still looked like a skeleton in the moonlight.

"You bet," Aseles replied said.

"Oh, look!" Goofy reached into his pocket, pulling out the three medallions in hand.

"You found them all!" Sora grinned happily, "Great job team!"

"Well done, lads and miss, we've found all four medallions," Jack answered, lending out his hand as the others placed the medallions in his grasp.

"How are we getting out of here?" Goofy asked.

"We have to find a ship," Jack answered.

"There!" Donald said, pointing off to a ship that was heading along the other side of the island. Who could that be?

"Hurry, we don't want to miss it!" Jack said, taking the lead. The rest followed as they all exited the cave, passing through rocky platforms.

MOMENTS LATER:

"You've got them all?" Will asked, coming down to the deck. Jack held the four medallions in his palm, then closed it tightly.

"You bet we did!" Sora said.

"But where's the chest?" Goofy asked.

"Probably in Port Royal," Sora answered.

"What makes you say that?" Elizabeth asked.

"Because, Organization XIII is collecting people's hearts, right? So, they're going where there's lots of people," Sora answered.

"They'll hurt the townsfolk?" Will asked.

"No, they're bringin' 'em flowers, mate," Jack rolled his eyes in annoyance. "Well, I don't know who these Organizers are, but they're making us pirates look like proper gents!" With that, Jack started, heading up to the wheel of the ship.

"I would be saying that," Aseles replied, scratching her cheek.

"Then let go and haul away free!" Jack yelled out. The rest nodded as the group began to loosen up the sails and tightened the ropes. Jack pulled the wheel toward the direction Port Royal with the help of his trusty compass.

In the meantime, Aseles readied herself as she looked among the sea, and slowly reached up to touch the surface of her lips. She felt warm along her neck, and slowly looked in the direction of Sora who was tying up his own ropes, and waving to Aseles from the other side. Aseles waved back, and shook the thought out as she looked on ahead, ready to take on Luxord and his dirty tricks.

## Escape

Jumping off the ship's deck, Sora, Donald, Goofy and Aseles followed Jack's lead down the pier while Will and Elizabeth stayed behind to guard the ship.

Aseles's footsteps stomped on the dock's boarded floor, the sea's surface hitting against the wood below them, the waves crashing upon the shore as the group skidded to a stop in the open area of crates and barrels, seeing Luxord standing with a large Heartless carrying an ax in its hand. Aseles could only question where Axel went, but decided not to get too curious, and aimed her attention at Luxord. Time for some payback for the major headache.

In the middle of the area stood the chest of medallions in it, glittering by the moon's light from above as the clouds moved away from its face. Jack's body converted to that of a skeleton as Sora held the four medallions in his hand, his hand in a fist as he stared dead center toward Luxord.

"Well done," Luxord grinned, "Now, I leave you to finish the job."

"No way you aren't!" Donald yelled as he charged to Luxord. The Heartless suddenly charged to Donald as Donald jumped back, the ax striking the dirt floor with a bang, bringing dust up with a huge crack formed. Luxord headed toward a black portal, giving the group a small glance before he disappeared in a wisp.

"Ay mate, how will we finish this beast?" Jack asked.

"We'll have to give it everything we got," Sora said as he charged as the Heartless swung its axe. Sora faced his keyblade forward as he was thrown in the air, passing his group overhead and thumping against the top of a crate. Donald next lighted his wand with cracking electricity, throwing the spell rapidly and hitting the skeleton Heartless head on.

To their luck, the skeleton Heartless was much like the skeleton pirates of Barbossa, and it began to flinch uncontrollably as Goofy sent his shield next, making it spin rapidly in the air as it struck against the swinging ax, deflecting its attack on Aseles and Jack. Jack charged with slashing sword with his bone palms gritting the handle of his sword tightly, his knuckles protruding upwards as the Heartless hollered with a screech. Aseles came next, slashing alongside Jack as Sora then jumped overhead, striking against the head of the Heartless. On contact, the Heartless's being suddenly spat out the medallions by the tens, making them scatter wildly across the dirt floor.

"Hurry, get the medallions!" Jack shouted as everyone began to frantically pick up the coins with Donald keeping the Heartless at bay with his magic spells. Aseles huffed in panic as she scooped up the medallions as best as she could, scraping up the dirt alongside them as she then ran back and forth to the chest, bending down and picking them up again. Sora had gathered all the coins from his side, helping Jack and Donald as Aseles then rushed over, collecting the last of the coins.

"Sora, the medallions!" Aseles shouted at him as he looked over, and remembered the ones he had put back in his pocket. Suddenly, Donald quaked overhead, tossed to the ground as Sora turned, deflecting the oncoming swung from the ax. The Heartless began to grow relentless, the bluish glow around it vibrating as it struck down again and again, suddenly knocking Sora down to his knees. The Heartless swung, tossing Sora across the air and making his back hit the brick walls at the side.

"Sora, throw them!" Donald shouted. Sora grunted as he swung an arm back, and tossed the four medallions forward. Donald leapt as he caught them, but now the Heartless redirected his attention



to the duck, and wasted no time in giving chase with swinging ax. Donald suddenly tripped, the medallions falling out of his hands and rolling on the ground. The Heartless lurched, but Aseles was quick to swing her keyblade like a bat, making its head rocket to the side and making the rest of its body stumble to the ground.

She swiftly turned, seeing Jack had collected the medallions and was now rushing to the chest, dropping them in. Aseles swiftly looks back, seeing the skeleton Grim Reaper Heartless had reverted back to a normal state of being, and Jack's form of flesh returned.

"This ends now!" Sora collected himself up, and charged as the rest of the group followed behind.

Sora struck downwards powerfully as the Heartless flew back. Donald came charging next, tossing a Thunder spell as it crackled along the body of the enemy. Goofy and Aseles came rushing next with Jack in front, their combined attacks finally ending the battle as the Heartless screeched in agony, and its grip on its ax fell entirely. It clattered to the dirt floor as the Grim Reaper twitched in the air, then stood still as it began to fall to ash among the air. A large, pink heart was released as it began to take rise into the air, with Sora looking at it intently.

"The heart..." Sora reached to it, but in a glitter, the heart was gone. His face dropped as Donald and Goofy came on either side of him, patting his shoulders reassuringly. Aseles sighed, turning to see Jack was heading to the chest, and closing the top of it securely with a good push downward on it.

"Thank you for the souvenir, Roxas," Luxord's voice boomed in the air, Sora charging forward with keyblade ready.

"Come out, you coward!" Sora gritted his teeth, whirling around, but there was no sight of the man. His back faced the group as Aseles rubbed her cheek. What was he thinking at this moment?

Sora then turned to face his group, a smile surprisingly on his face, "We'll get him next time, don't worry." Aseles looked at him worriedly, knowing full well that Sora...was probably raging in the inside. That yell was nothing but rage...and he was just going to go back lightly to his cheery disposition all of a sudden? Aseles couldn't tell if he was just trying to fool himself.

Will and Elizabeth suddenly ran through the docks of the Harbor heading to the gang.

"Is everything alright?" Elizabeth asked.

"Everything's fine, except for this bloody ol' chest," Jack said.

"So how will we get rid of it?" Will asked. "For good this time."

"Can Sora lock it with his keyblade?" Goofy asked.

"I'll give it a try," Sora said as he took out his keyblade, directing the tip of it on the front center, "But...wait...there's no lock."

"Can you make one?" Aseles came beside him. "Um...can the keyblade do that? I'm not sure..."

"It's worth a shot," Sora shrugged as he aimed his keyblade to the object again. There was a bright glimmer at the front of it, and the keyblade pinged as a keyhole glittered into view in front of the chest. Sora kept his weapon suddenly, and the keyhole glittered brightly as the sound of a lock followed behind. Sora lowered his keyblade, "Alright, try to open it." Jack took a stride forward, and heaved on the top of the chest, but to no avail he could not open it.

"There we go, much better," Will replied.

“Good work lads, and lassy. I will be sure to make sure this is never found....ever,” Jack clicked his tongue. “I suppose you be on your way then? That man did seem relentless on his intentions here.”

“Yeah....we better get going,” Sora nodded quickly. “We’ll be catching you guys later. Jack...?”

“Yes, boy?”

“...Stay out of trouble,” the group commented in unison. Jack grinned as Sora scoffed, shaking his head. He lifted a hand as he waved to the trio, Donald, Goofy and Aseles bidding farewell as the group began to hurry up the stone steps leading to the Rampart above.

Donald was quick to take the gummi ship back to the skies, but Aseles seemed to be feeling a loss more than a victory. She sat quite still in her seat, with her legs pressed against her chest and the soles of her feet pressing against the seat she was on. She looked over momentarily to Sora’s direction, seeing his face was glancing up out the window, lost in thought. His crossed arms were rigid on his chest, his hands in fists as his eyes narrowed, their gaze slowly dropping as he now looked to the floor.

What game...was Organization XIII playing? What worried Aseles was Axel....seeing that man seemed to have an agenda of his own.

Aseles’s eyes grew heavy, and for a moment she thought she was being pulled under again by Namine. The feel was familiar...but she was drifting in and out of sleep. What if she slept...and Organization XIII was waiting for her?

“Aseles, go to sleep.” Aseles slightly turned, seeing Sora had stood up, and was bending down to look at Aseles from the side of her chair. Aseles’s eyes flickered, and she blushed greatly when she felt the back of his hand graze the side of her face.

“We’re right here,” Sora whispered, and Aseles obeyed to her slumber.

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*"Aseles....Aseles."*

*"...Roxas....is that....you? I can't...hear you...right...."*

*"I came to warn you. Listen....are you listening?"*

*Aseles nodded, but felt very still. She couldn't move.*

*"Warn me....about what?"*

*"Organization XIII..... You have to be careful. Don't fall for any of their tricks. Do you understand?"*

*"Roxas...why are...you warning me? I thought...you were....a part of them..... "*

*"You have to watch yourself. I don't want to see you get hurt. Don't stray away like you always do. I have to go."*

*"Roxas....wait.....wait...."*

FFW:

Aseles flickered her eyes, feeling the blankets slip off of her as she stretched her arms up on the bed. She coughed gently to clear her throat of the morning burn, and she finally opened her eyes enough to stare at the ceiling above of the room. She turned to look at the side with groggy eyes, seeing Sora, Donald and Goofy were still slumbering, their snores mounting up in the room, all except for Sora who seemed, again, rigid in his sleep.

Aseles slowly sat up, looking to him as she rubbed the corner of her eye, yawning gently. Her attention turned as she slid her bare legs over to the side, sitting up. She looked to the table beside the bed, and saw a note resting on top a bundle of clothes.

She reached for it, yawning again as she blinked several times to adjust her vision, and began to read:

*Aseles.*

*I might as well leave your clothes beside your bed I guess. Didn't want to wake you up and hope you like them.*

*Well, we'll be in Merlin's Study by the time you wake up. So....what are you waiting for? Get dressed already!*

*-Yuffie*

Aseles scoffed, reaching forward to grip the clothes in hand. She looked at the dark jeans, stretching them out. Aseles quirked her mouth to one side, seeing that she even got her a new shirt.....but.....

Aseles stood up as she bundled up the new shirt and placed it under the bed, reaching for Sora's extra shirt and her old shoes beside with the new jeans and socks in hand. She made her way across to the bathroom, locking the door as she undressed out of her muscle shirt and shorts, and cleansed herself with the warm water. Once out, she brushed her teeth and combed her damp hair, but merely ended up tying it in a bun above her head again, the layers in the front dangling in front of her forehead and ears.

Next she began to dress, slipping into the new jeans, finding them completely smooth to her skin. Next she placed on Sora's shirt, tucking it in as she then placed on her socks and shoes after drying her feet. Making sure everything fit correctly, Aseles hanged up her towel and was out the door, carrying her bundled pajamas in hand and tossing them under the bed with the new shirt. She fixed her bed as best as she could, but noticed she had missed another piece of article.

Aseles reached for the long, black gloves at the side, and slipped them on easily as they bundled at the top, but fit snuggling along her wrists and forearm. She wiggled her fingers, smiling softly to herself. With a rotation of her ankles and a deep breath, Aseles headed for the door, and closed it gently behind her, making sure she would not wake up the others.

Walking down the steps, Aseles ended up in the kitchen, and served herself something quick to eat and some water to drink, and then she was out the door into the warm morning of the world.

Aseles arrived to Merlin's Study, but she found the door open. She slowly stepped forward, pushing the door as she looked around...but found the room completely empty.

"Leon....Yuffie? Cid?" Aseles blinked, looking around. "Umm.....Hello?" you asked. Aseles turned, but she took a step back, seeing Sora was arriving next from the corner. Aseles walked over to him, surprised he was even up.

"Aren't the others in there?" Sora answered, his hands behind his head.

"How did you know?"

"The note," he said, a grin on his face.

"Um....I went to check but...there's no one there...."

"...What?" Sora raised a brow, and passed her as Aseles began to follow behind him. Sora headed inside as Aseles waited outside for him, but after a couple of seconds, Sora was back out, and closed the door behind him firmly, "That's....weird. They're usually in there."

"Maybe they're at the Market Place?" Aseles suggested.

"Then we should start there," Sora replied, leading the way.

The two walked side by side as Aseles looked over to Sora, clearing her throat, "Are you....feeling alright?"

"Hmm? Yeah...I feel fine," Sora blinked, confused. "Do I not look like it?"

"...Well....I have to ask because...of what happened in Port Royal," Aseles replied, looked at the floor.

"...I'm really sorry I hesitated," Sora replied, stopping.

Aseles turned to look at him, "I can only imagine...what's going on in your head, Sora."

"It's just...." Sora exhaled deeply, gripping his forehead tightly. "We really...need to stop Organization XIII."

"Yes, I know," Aseles replied.

"We need to keep fighting. If we won't...then who will?" Sora replied as he began to walk once more, leading the way up the flight of stairs toward the Market Place with Aseles closed beside.

"You miss her don't you?" Aseles asked.

Sora looked at her, but the realization hit, and he nodded slowly, "Yes...I do."

"Do you like her?" Aseles asked.

"Huh? Like her?" Aseles nodded. "No, not like that."

"Are you sure?" Aseles raised a brow.

"Where are you getting at?" Sora inquired, staring back at Aseles.

"Well-" CLANG.

Aseles and Sora shot their heads around, looking toward the Market Place as the duo began to hurrying run the rest of the steps. There was a few people running from the scene as Aseles skidded to a halt, seeing Yuffie and Leon were on the ground, Yuffie throwing her body over Leon's as she looked up, wounded from her arms and legs to the Organization XIII member standing before them.

The member held some sort of blade, with the Organization insignia among the head of the weapon. It looked like a lance, but the man was holding it much like a sword in possession.

Aseles's heart skipped a beat, making her clutch her stomach as she stared at Leon's abdomen, seeing a flash of red running down his side. Yuffie was pressing her hands against it, though her eyes were glued to the Organization XIII member.

"Stop!" Sora ran forward, but he skidded to a halt as the member suddenly directed the head daggers of his weapon to Yuffie's head, keeping it there. Sora froze as Aseles stayed glued to her spot, staring in disbelief.

"What the hell are you doing here?!" Sora screamed, his hands into fists.

"Aseles....your time is up," the member replied. Aseles felt her stomach flip horrifically; it was the same man from before, during Cloud's training.

"Aseles, Sora, Yuffie, run!" Leon coughed out.

"Don't underestimate me," the man replied, pressing his weapon against Yuffie's head. Yuffie froze, her eyes wide as she looked up at the member.

"Stop it!" Aseles shouted.

"It will be the last thing you do!" Sora shouted as his keyblade gleamed in sight. Aseles quickly hurried, gripping his arm and yanking his keyblade down to the ground. Sora shot his eyes to her, "What are you doing?!"

"Sora....no," Aseles shook her head quickly, and then looked to the man, "If I go.....you will leave?"

The man gripped the top of his hood, and pulled it back, revealing the stream of light, blue hair running down his shoulders. His golden eyes pierced the area as they looked to Aseles, with the engraved "X" on his face sinking along the bridge of his nose.

"Precisely," he replied.

"....I'll go," Aseles gritted her teeth.

"What?! NO!" Sora replied.

"I said I'll go!" Aseles shot her eyes to Sora, "No excuses." Sora stared at her in disbelief as Aseles faced forward, and began to slowly make her way toward the man. The man kept his weapon steady on Yuffie's head, until Aseles was now standing before him, looking up to him in his tall stature. "Just don't hurt Leon or Yuffie anymore...."

"Aseles, run!" Yuffie pleaded, "Don't fall for it." Aseles saw the man lowering his weapon, and Aseles waited for him to relinquish it, however-

"Ahh!" Aseles yelped as she fell back, gripping her wound on her stomach as she stumbled back, clutching her abdomen as the air escaped from her lungs. Sora motioned his feet forward, but skid to a stop once more as Aseles could feel the blades' tips against the side of her head. She froze, shaking terribly as she was kneeling, her eyes looking among the ground for some relief.

Aseles winced as she felt the back of her shirt gripped, picking Aseles off the floor as she staggered on her feet.

"Then I believe I have come for what I came for," the man replied. "Farewell." The world was engulfed in darkness as Aseles shut her eyes, squirming as the arm around her held her steadily. Aseles could feel the world dark and cold, and finally a bright flash of light invaded her eyes,

making her groan. She was pushed forward, and she hit the marble floor, grunting as she squirmed with wriggling legs beneath her. Again she was gripped, her head perking up to see she was in the white hallway from her dreams....no...she was actually here. She was really here.

"Saix, you know better than to make a mess on the floor." Aseles looked up to the second member that had arrived from a nearby doorway, a scar running down the side of his left cheek down to his chin. He wore an eye-patch covering his right eye, and a black ponytail swayed a bit behind him as he tilted his head at Aseles.

"Is the cell prepared for her, Xigbar?"

"Yes it is. A little friend is waiting for her in there," Xigbar grinned. Aseles grunted as she was picked up by the back of her shirt again, her feet lifted from the ground as she squirmed. "Be quick about it, we're having a meeting," Xigbar answered.

Saix began to make his way across the hallway, Aseles fighting, but gripping her abdomen as the small splashes of red ran down over her fingers. She winced from Saix's abrupt turns around corners, and finally she was in front of a purple cell, the large bars containing a small figure inside. They opened from one side as Aseles was gently settled inside, her body lying on the cold ground. The bars behind her closed, and she heard the sound of something locking, and finally the disappearing footsteps.

"Don't be getting any ideas," Saix called from the distance.

"Who are you?" Aseles looked up roughly, wincing as she saw the flow of red hair bouncing in front of her view. It was a girl, in a pink zippered dress.

Aseles opened her mouth, "Are you....Kairi....?"

The girl's eyes widened and she nodded hurriedly, "We need to heal that wound."

"I have a potion...in my pocket," Aseles replied. The girl quickly began to fiddle with Aseles's pants' pockets, and in one of the compartment beside her lower leg was a potion. Aseles felt the tip of the bottle against her lips, and she opened her mouth, letting the green liquid rush down her throat. Instantly, Aseles felt better, and could properly sit up. The bottle disappeared, leaving Kairi's hand bare as she lowered it to rest it on her knee. Her eyes looked to Aseles as Aseles looked back to her, nodding her thanks.

"Where are we?" Aseles inquired, looking about the cell.

"In Organization XIII headquarters," Kairi answered, "Who are you...why did they bring you here?"

"We need...to get out of here," Aseles replied, shaking her head as she stood, wiping off the dirt from her back as she stood. Kairi quickly followed, looking to her. "My name is Aseles, and I know your friend, Sora."

"Sora? You know Sora?!" Kairi shot her face forward, gripping Aseles's arm. "Where is he?"

"He's safe but....we need to worry about ourselves first," Aseles replied, looking around the cell. She went toward the bars, tugging at them, but to no avail. Aseles huffed, flashing out her keyblade as she banged it against the bars this time, but the clanging left no mark on them.

"You have a keyblade?" Kairi hurriedly stepped forward.

"It's....a long story," Aseles rolled her eyes, continuing to clang it powerfully against the bars, but

no success.

“S-Stop! It’s not working!” Kairi hurried, gripping onto Aseles’s shoulder.

“NO, we have to get out! We can’t stay here!” Aseles shouted, gritting her teeth.

“It’s no use...” Kairi swiftly clutched Aseles’s wrist. Aseles whirled her eyes around to look at her. “...I’m sorry....” Aseles felt her chest shudder as she lowered her keyblade, letting it clatter to the floor. Aseles dropped down on her rear, clutching her hair tightly with her hands as she threw her face forward.

“We need to....get out....” Aseles could feel herself shiver. Quickly Aseles stood up, and looking to Kairi intently, “I need to know why Axel kidnapped you.”

“Huh?” Kairi raised a brow. “Well....I’m not.....so sure...myself. He was talking about how Sora wanted to see me....but I didn’t believe him.” Jeezes Axel....

There was the sound of a loud thud, and Kairi froze, Aseles quickly shooting her eyes up, and began to hear the sound of approaching footsteps.

“Damn it...their meeting is already done?” Aseles looked around, but she blinked. Her keyblade was gone. Aseles swung her arm...but it was not appearing on command. Aseles swung her arm again, but nothing, “Not again!”

“What’s wrong?” Kairi quickly asked.

“Come...on!” Aseles threw her arm across, upward, down, fingers spread to their ultimate extension, but nothing was being called upon her claim.

“Looks like someone is having trouble.” Aseles swiftly shot up, seeing Xigbar was there, along with Axel beside. Aseles quickly gripped Kairi’s wrist, and began to make way for the end of the cell. She instinctively placed Kairi behind her, and stood at the ready as the bars at the side opened, Axel walking in. with Xigbar behind him.

“Are you going to come quietly, or do we have to fetch you?” Xigbar sneered. Aseles gritted her teeth, watching as Axel’s eyes narrowed in her direction, his eyes scorching as much as the flames on his head.

“Don’t resist,” Axel replied firmly.

“Where you’re taking us, we’re not going!” Aseles shouted.

“Oh, we’re not taking both of you,” Xigbar smirked widely. Aseles’s eyes widened. “We’re just taking you.”

LATER, SORA’S POV:

"Slow down Sora!" Donald demanded, grabbing onto his seat. Goofy closed his eyes shut as the sky zipped past them rapidly, the gummi ship rapidly piercing through the stars.

"No, we have to find Aseles," Sora answered quietly, the control of the gummi ship resting in his shaking, sweating hands. Goofy stood up from his seat as he rushed to Sora, his hands slamming onto his shoulders.

"Snap out of it, Sora!" Goofy said, ripping Sora's hands off the controls. Sora looked at Goofy, standing up out of his seat. "We'll never find Aseles this way," Goofy added. Sora stood and

paced forward.

"Just because Aseles wasn't in Hercules' world doesn't mean she won't be found," Goofy said again. After dealing with the Nobodies there, Aseles was nowhere in sight. But Goofy was right; Sora shouldn't be rushing things so quickly. He might miss something, or he just might lose hope and control.

"Fine," Sora said, sitting back down in his seat, his arms crossed on his chest.

"You need some sleep," Donald said, taking command of the ship as it sailed through the sky with slowness and ease.

Sora sat in his seat, limp and tired with dark circles under his soft eyes. He decided to sleep at least for now, and defeat the next Nobodies that crossed his path in Halloween Town. And he would defeat them quickly, wanting to see Aseles safe with her friends.

ASELES'S POV:

Aseles groaned, feeling the cold floor of her own room encircle around her. The light was dim in here, but nothing but the shining moon shining down its rays from up the gap of the ceiling above her. She struggled to open her lulling eyes, unsure for how long she had slept.

Aseles finally sat up; her wrists bind with tough rope as she shook her head clean. She looked around the small cell she was locked in, and began to worry what was being done with Kairi.

"Rise and shine!" Aseles could hear Xigbar from out the metal door, and she began to yank at the ropes around her wrists. She kicked violently from the frustration, but she failed as the door of her room opened, and up popped Xigbar's face into view, "How did the princess sleep?"

"Let me go!" Aseles commanded, but she was swiftly picked up from the ground, her back pressing against Xigbar's chest. Aseles grunted as she struggled, but then found one palm crashing against her throat, making her stop. She breathed heavily, feeling her race redden with ire.

"Now now, if you keep putting up a fight, I'm going to have to put you in your place," Xigbar replied, and began to lead the way once again, pushing Aseles in front.

"Where are we going? Where's Kairi?" Aseles demanded.

"Why are you so worried about? If I were you, I would be wondering what would happen to *me*. You screwed up numerous times, and I don't think Xemnas is going to be taking that lightly." Aseles was led down a long white hallway, walking down some stairs as they were soon walking in another long corridor, with a pair of doors at the end. It looked...rather familiar.

Xigbar stood in front of them, with another Organization member waiting by them. Xigbar handed Aseles over to him, the rough hands gripping the back of Aseles's restraints. Aseles was pulled back, and it was a second later when she noticed it was Axel who was now gripping her.

"I'll put her in," Axel replied, removing his hood as letting the red streams run down his shoulders and top back.

"Hmph, fine," Xigbar replied, waving a hand of as he began to walk back up the corridor, and turned, out of sight.

"Axel, what are you doing?" Aseles struggled, "You have to let me go."

"I don't have to," Axel simply replied.



Aseles shot her head around, staring up at him as he towered over her, “What are you going to do? What are you planning?”

“You have to escape,” Axel suddenly replied.

Aseles’s eyes widened, “....What? What did you just-“

“I’m not repeating myself twice,” Axel replied more sternly, hissing almost.

“You’re telling me to escape? I don’t understand,” Aseles swiftly retorted back. “Will you help me?”

“No, I won’t,” Axel cut in right after. “You’re going to have to do it on your own. Looking up is your answer.” Aseles stared at him perplexed, but Axel wasted no time in opening the doors at the side. The binds on Aseles were instantly ripped off, and she was sent stumbling in. Aseles yelped as she threw herself on her side, falling onto the hard floor. She quickly shot around, but found the doors slammed shut, and closed.

Aseles turned her attention back forward, and she found herself in a large open area, against the thick glass wall on the other side with the seating members on the other side. Aseles stood perfectly still, and began to survey the area, but found no way on how to escape. There were no windows, and no other doors. An appearing member on the other side of the wall entered, and Axel sat next to one of the seats beside the one named Saix, his fingers rubbing his temple, stretching his gloved fingers upward on the side of his head. Aseles shook her head slowly to herself, not understand of Axel’s switching roles. Was he trying to help her, or deceive her?

“And again...here we are.” The center member of the chairs stood up, and opening his thick arms to the sides of him, his face shrouded in the darkness of his hood. Aseles stood at the ready, and opened her hand at the side....but the keyblade did not arrive. No....No.....

“What do you want?!” Aseles shouted out, glaring at the center man, taking the guess that he was Xemnas.

“You only scream in anger because the one item will not assist you. How does it feel....relying on something as simple as a key to do your bidding?” Xemnas suddenly replied. Aseles felt her stomach drop, and she took a step back, turning her hands into white fists.

“You have done nothing but rejected my offers....and I believe it is time that I rid you of existence. If you do not wish to join me, I will not let you continue to trek along your journey, and ruin my plans. You have *much* potential, Aseles, but I believe your options have now come down to just one.”

“What is it that you want with me? I don’t understand,” Aseles called out to him, shaking her head. “You say I am of use to you, but you don’t explain any of it! You say that I am of your kind, but you won’t explain any of that either. Why should I believe you, when maybe everything is a lie?”

“You believe it is a lie...because your mind has been corrupted. You say you don’t believe, because were taught that way. You side with what you have been taught is right, but how do you know that the path they have chosen for you is the *right* one?” Xemnas began to seat himself back down, and he crossed his ankle on top of his bent knee, his gloved fingers tenting together in front of him, with his elbows prompted on the arms of the stone chair.

“You do not recall your memories, and you do not recall family or friends. Your mind has been meddled with...and I know the person responsible for it,” Xemnas replied. Aseles froze, her eyes

widening to the leader as her mouth stood slightly agape.

“H-How do I know you’re not lying to me right now?” Aseles gulped, holding her stance against the floor.

“I have no reason to lie to you to this point, and I do not see why I should. You seek nothing but answers, for a place to fit, much like us. You are one of us, despite us not having a heart; you feel like a Nobody in these worlds, it shows on your face, the anguish, the confusion of it all. You are treated with caution, as much as us. You seek nothing but to find a place to fit in, but why go looking for that elsewhere, when beings such as us understand your feelings perfectly?”

“You do not....feel....” Aseles trembled.

“But we remember what it’s like. You may have lost your memories, but that does not mean you can’t go looking for them. I can lead you to the man who has corrupted your mind, but in order to do that, you must give yourself to me, and give me the oath that you will not betray us. This is our home, and we are inviting you within it...” Xemnas replied coolly. “You have the skills to communicate with a Nobody...is that not proof enough?” He knew.....he knew.

Aseles looked upon the group behind the glass, feeling her chest heave. She felt her heart becoming enveloped, squished into a box, the sides of it scratching along the flesh of it. She clutched her chest, her eyes blinking uncontrollably as she suddenly fell on her knees. She looked to the ground, the tingling of her flesh running along her face and the base of her throat. Xemnas was getting inside her head.

*You have to escape.*

"Aseles, stand your ground," Xemnas ordered. A jolt of adrenaline gushed through her body, but Aseles began to stand, her eyes shaking in their sockets as she looked to the man again, hidden beneath the shadow of his hood. "I'm afraid this has come to an end," Xemnas answered.

“I will not....give in to any tricks of yours,” Aseles gritted her teeth.

“I am done trying to make you see the error of your ways,” Xemnas replied coldly.

“There is nothing wrong with me!” Aseles flared her arms open. She shot her eyes up toward the ceiling, and there, she could see the crack of the ceiling.

*Looking up is your answer.*

Aseles’s body flared in dark wisps as she shot her eyes toward the glass window, “I will not be swayed by you! I may not remember anything, but that does not mean I am as desperate as you are to get where I need to go!” The dark formation of Aseles’s hands flew outward, and the winds crashed against the walls as Aseles could feel her whole body quake with Darkness.

*Go, Aseles.*

Aseles swung her arm, and in a flash her hand, her keyblade flashed into view. Aseles shouted as she tossed her keyblade upward, her hand letting go of the handle as the keyblade rocketed through the air, and hit the crack in the ceiling. The concrete began to crumble down as Aseles then leapt upward, keyblade back in hand as the waterfall of Darkness began to push her upwards, her feet landing on the falling bricks as she began to climb herself up, throwing rockets of fire balls to launch herself up from side to side.

"Eliminate the wielder!" Xemnas ordered.

Aseles quickly began to run up the crumbling concrete as she launched herself forward, gripping onto the edge of the rooftop, and hauled herself on top of the slanting tower. She grunted as she began to run down the tilted ramp, losing her footings as she began to slide down with a yelp, her hands gripping onto the ledge. She looked down, seeing a flat rooftop.

*"Aseles, run!"*

"Na-Namine?" Aseles whirled around.

*"You must run!"*

Aseles swiftly let go, falling onto the rooftop as she regained her footing, and began to run across the cold air of the high altitude. Aseles ducked as the sound of shooting darts came from behind, the purple, illuminated diamonds cutting into the roof as Aseles sped up her sprint, jumping overhead as she began to slide down another slanting side of a tower. She looked down to see a white bridge connecting itself from the castle to the dark city below.

Aseles fell back as she began to slide on her back, the huge card slicing across the air and cutting off the ends of her bangs. She began to roll downward as she hit the hard floor, grunting. She stood up as hurriedly as she could, limping somewhat as she began to shoot herself across the bridge. She looked back to see the jumping black figures heading her way.

Aseles looked ahead, entering the dark district of the city, her pants echoing among the deserted world as she slipped herself in between tight alleyways and through the entrances and exits of the buildings. She was unsure where they would lead her, but she had to lose the members off of her trail.

Suddenly, Aseles felt the push of a body against her, and she screamed into the muffling, gloved hand. The small stature sent Aseles cutting off her scream, and the sticking strands of blond caught her attention.

"This way!" Roxas tugged her along as Aseles struggled to keep up, feeling her thigh pulsing from the drop she had moments ago. Finally, Roxas stopped as he slammed his body against hers, shrouding them both in the darkness of the alleyway with his cloak unzipped from the front. He quickly wrapped the sides of it around Aseles's body, pinning her against the wall as he pushed her face and head against his neck, hiding her within the confinements of the large hood.

"Be still," Roxas whispered as Aseles gripped the front of his shirt, her eyes shutting as she could hear the sound of approaching footsteps from several directions. She could hear Saix, and Luxord, until finally she heard Xigbar and Axel not too far.

"I can't believe this....we lost the girl," Xigbar tsked in annoyance, "The little brat." Aseles felt herself tremble, feeling her finger tug at Roxas's shirt further.

"Aseles, shh," Roxas whispered, almost inaudible as Aseles kept herself as steady as she could, biting onto her tongue to prevent herself from making any noise.

"She's gone, let's go," Axel replied.

"....You're giving up the search that easily?" Xigbar retorted back, almost suspicious.

"She's gone. What else do you want me to do?"

"Why am I getting this funny feeling that you're planning something, Axel?"

"I'm not planning anything," Axel replied back firmly. There was a grim silence, and then the

footsteps began to retreat. It was all still for ten minutes until finally Roxas let go of Aseles, resting her head back as he began to zip up his cloak back. Aseles looked to him, rubbing her hands together as she shuddered.

"It's alright, they're gone," Roxas reassured her, rubbing her arms up and down.

"For now.....for now they're gone," Aseles shuddered.

"Are you alright? You were limping," Roxas claimed, "Did you injure your leg?"

"A bit...but I'm fine," Aseles nodded quickly. Roxas took her hand, and began to lead her.

"Where are we going?"

"We're going to rest. You're injured," Roxas replied as he approached a building at the side, and forcefully opened the door. He slipped inside and led Aseles within it. He went back to the door and closed it weightily behind him, and proceeded to lead Aseles a little bit to the side, "Sit." Aseles sat against the wall as Roxas took the side closest to the door. He pushed the side of his body against Aseles's as she rested her head on his shoulder, looking ahead as she curled up slightly, hugging her knees.

"How did you get out? That place is a fortress," Roxas asked.

"The ceiling was tampered with....Axel told me to escape," Aseles replied.

"...Axel told you?" Roxas questioned.

Aseles nodded, "...Yes." She looked to him, and noticed a particular gleam in his sky eyes, "...Is there something wrong?"

"No...No, nothing is wrong," Roxas shook his head. Aseles looked at him curiously, but noticed that he had dropped the subject completely. "Go to sleep, Aseles. It will do you some good."

"...I'm...not sure if I can..." Aseles rubbed her eyes.

"Try to...I'll be here, I promise," Roxas replied. Aseles looked to him, but nodded slightly as she leaned against his shoulder, flickering her eyes to a close, and felt the strong heave of her chest drop. She could feel her fingers limp one by one, and felt the gloved hand giving them a secure squeeze.

"I'll keep you safe....go to sleep...."

But the sleep did not last long. Aseles felt herself shift in her spot, and looked up past her eyelashes to see Roxas looking down at her. He reached to push her bangs out of her face to look at her properly.

"Already?" Roxas asked. "It's only been two hours."

"Yes...I feel better, thank you," Aseles nodded as she began to shift in her spot. Roxas stood up, and held out his hand to her. She took it as she was then helped up, her feet slightly stumbling in place. She straightened out her gloves and shirt, rubbing her face as she cleared her throat of the sweltering sensation in her throat. Roxas looked out the window door, opening it as he let Aseles walk out first, and he followed behind her, closing the door.

Aseles turned to face him, "Thank you....for saving me, Roxas."

"Gladly," Roxas smiled. "I'll be there when you need someone the most." Aseles smiled fondly to

him, and she went forward, wrapping her arms around his waist. Roxas hugged her back gently, patting her back as the two parted, “I will be able to conjure up a portal for you, but once I do, Organization XIII will pick up on the movement. Understood?”

“Yes, I understand,” Aseles replied.

“Now go, before they find you, it will take you to where you want to go,” Roxas replied. Aseles looked to see Roxas holding up his right hand, and a black portal began to emerge in a dark wisp, “Go.” Aseles quickly began to make her way into the darkness of the place, and turned to see Roxas looking within. The dim light of the twilight from the world began to vanish as Aseles was now left alone in the dark abyss of the portal. She faced forward, and began to hurry her way through.

“I’m coming guys,” Aseles huffed, her arms swinging by her sides.

## The Key

Amazingly...Aseles was not afraid of this Darkness. It almost felt warm to her as she looked around, seeing several pathways were lit with faint glows of different colors, but none were calling for Aseles to approach. She continued to walk farther, almost lost in a trance, and feeling this soft tingle across her skin. She wondered how Roxas was even able to find out where she was, but what surprised her more was the fact that she was able to escape that castle in the first place. There seemed to have been no chance of running...if it hadn't been for Axel's hint. But...why would he help her? Did he want something in return; was there something for him that Aseles didn't know about?

"I see you are well."

Aseles froze, and she quickly whirled around, her eyes widening to see a figure was standing a few yards away, covered in those red bandages again. His bright eye scanned her face as Aseles backed a step away, unsure if her keyblade would appear or not. Would she dare try to attack this man? He had saved her in Agrabah...does he pose a threat?

"Who are you? Why do you keep following me?" Aseles inquired angrily. "I don't take lightly to that kind of behavior anymore."

He suddenly chuckled, stroking his bandaged chin, "I can only hope so....though I am glad that you had escaped Organization XIII's clutches." His voice turned stern, almost to hurt as Aseles watched him intently, "They were trying to trick you since the very beginning, and I don't think they will take it too well if you continued to battle against their forces."

"You're...looking out for me," Aseles blinked, calming her case of the shakes a bit as she straightened up. The man nodded, taking a couple of steps forward to stand properly in view of Aseles. She looked up to his bright eye, trying to decipher what his skin tone really was.

"Indeed I am. You play an important role, Aseles, but perhaps right now is not the right time to inform you of what truth lies ahead of you. Organization XIII continues to grow in power, and is not only combatting against you, but against the Heartless as well."

"What do you mean?" Wait..... Aseles's eyes widened, and she took a sturdy step back, glaring at the man, "Xemnas....he said someone knew of my past...is that you?"

"Indeed I am-" the man replied lowly, "-but I do not wish to fight you."

"Then what are you here for?" Aseles growled, "What do you know about me?"

"I know much about you....but I do not want to damage you more than you already are, Aseles."

"What do you mean?" Aseles blinked, relaxing her pose again, just slightly.

The man took a step forward, and was gently towering over her a bit, looking down to her, "Your mind is in a fragile state, and I fear if I tell you certain things, the very source of bond collecting your thoughts together might shatter. Your mind has indeed been manipulated, but now is not the time to let such things unfold until you are stronger. You are strong, but you must become stronger."

"....Who are you?" Aseles blinked, looking at him closely as she shuddered in place, "Why are you helping me?"

“You have been deceived for too long, young one, and I believe it is time that you begin to face what has been taken from you...”

“Please, tell me your name,” Aseles pleaded, taking a small step forward, looking up at him fully now, gripping the front of his red robes. The man’s eye glittered, and he placed a gloved hand on top of Aseles’s head, rubbing it gently. “Tell me your name...please don’t leave me without telling your name.”

“My name is Ansem the Wise.....I believe you have heard of me.” Aseles’s eyes widened and she blinked, but the moment she opened her eyes again, the man was gone.

“No...no no!” Aseles waved her hands frantically in front of her, grasping the air, wondering if he had just turned invisible...but he was really gone. “No....come back! Please! I have questions!” Aseles whirled around, but found no presence around. The man was truly gone.

“Girl!” Aseles shot her eyes up, suddenly seeing several black figures running into her direction. The Organization.

Aseles quickly whirled around, sprinting across the darkness of the path, but felt as if she were running in place, “Hurry up!” Aseles panted heavily as she found a glittering portal on the floor, different than the other, vertical pathways around. She quickly dove into it, and found herself falling flat onto the cement, brick floor. The portal behind her swiftly closed, but she waited for a few moments to see if another portal would emerge. It seemed she got a clean get away...for now.

Aseles stood up as she dusted her arms and legs off, looking to see she was near Merlin’s Study, just a few yards away from the door. She coughed as she stood, sighing deeply from the sudden urge to sleep and rest.

“Aseles?!” Aseles shot around, seeing Yuffie was there, along with Leon. Aseles quickly headed over, feeling Yuffie embrace her tightly, brushing the back of Aseles’s head, “You’re okay!”

“Are you guys okay? Leon?” Aseles looked to Yuffie, and then hurried over to Leon, looking down at his shirt. Leon wrapped his arms around Aseles’s shoulder, pulling her in as Aseles buried her face into his chest, hugging him gently. She could feel the tight binding of his abdomen, feeling that he had been bandaged up with gauze.

“Aseles...how did you get here?” Leon questioned, parting away and holding her shoulders tightly. He seemed to inspect her, lifting her face up gently then letting it go as he looked over her arms and legs.

“I had some help.....and I saw- Wait, where are Sora, Donald and Goofy?”

“ASELES!” Aseles turned, but Leon immediately backed away as Aseles fell flat to the ground, tackled by Donald and Goofy.

“OWW.....Donald, Goofy!!” Aseles cheered as she embraced them tightly, giving Donald a firm squeeze. He quaked from the sudden movement, and Aseles giggled as Goofy helped her up.

“Aseles, we’ve been looking all over for you,” Goofy replied.

“Where’s Sora?” Aseles questioned. Goofy and Donald pointed, and Aseles hurried to see Sora coming from around the corner. His eyes blinked up, and they widened at Aseles’s approach. He smiled widely as he rushed forward, wrapping his arms around Aseles as she hugged him back tightly, feeling the scent of the sea on him. She sniffed him gently on the side of his neck, blushing with eyes closed to feel his own nose trailing across the side of her hair and head. They both parted as Sora gripped her arms, unable to rid of that large smile on his face.

"Aseles, when did you get here??" he questioned.

"Just now...actually. Still kind of sore," Aseles replied, rubbing her back with a hand.

"What happened? With the Organization??" Sora's face turned grim instantly.

"Oh....." Aseles nodded quickly, and then looked to Leon, "We need to head into Merlin's Study, so I can tell you guys."

"Of course, Yuffie, some help please," Leon replied. Yuffie quickly headed over to him and began to lead him forward, his arm over her shoulders as Leon walked steadily forward, somewhat holding onto his side with his other hand. Sora hurried to the door as he held it open for Yuffie and Leon to enter, signaling Aseles next as she walked in. Donald and Goofy were last to enter as Sora closed the door, Aseles now paying attention inside. Cid turned in his chair with Aerith standing beside him, their eyes the arriving group.

"Kid! You're here!" Cid stood up from his chair, Aerith hurrying over as she cradled Aseles's face in her hands. Aseles smiled briefly as then Merlin stood up from his chair, hurriedly looking over Aseles once for any injury.

"I daresay, you left with such a warning for the rest of us," Merlin replied.

"She's alright, that's all that matters," Sora replied firmly, and suddenly wrapped his arm around Aseles's waist from the side. Aseles looked to him briefly, but cleared her throat, looking to Leon as she took a step forward, feeling Sora's grip on her firm. Well, he wasn't letting go she guessed.

"Uh...I might as well tell you what happened," Aseles began.

As best as she could, Aseles began to describe the interior of the place she was held in, and how she had met up with Kairi. Sora's grip on her then let go as he stared at her, but Aseles pushed the thought out and continued, stating on what Xemnas had proposed to her. Leon watched Aseles intently as she finished explaining how she got away with Roxas's aid, and then finally, the encounter with Ansem the Wise.

"Ansem the Wise? *The* Ansem?" Leon asked.

"Yes...he claimed himself to be...but I wasn't sure. He didn't look like the one in the painting from the Study...." Aseles rubbed her head. Could it have really been Ansem the Wise?

"Well what did he tell you?" Yuffie quickly insisted.

"I....couldn't make sense of it, but my guess is...is that he knows more about me....but...he didn't want to tell me at the moment," Aseles replied. "Also, that Organization XIII is....fighting against the Heartless?"

"Yup...it seems like it," Sora nodded, crossing his arms as he looked to the ground, "We saw it in the Underworld first, and then it kept progressing along the other ones."

"This is strange indeed. It doesn't seem like Maleficent would be fighting alongside Organization XIII then...which should settle our nerves a bit...but that doesn't change the fact that both should be eliminated," Leon replied, stroking his chin as he leaned against the wall for support.

"Whelp, seems now we've got more problems here too." The group turned to look at Cid, who was on his computer typing with speed.



"What's wrong?" Yuffie asked.

"The system, it's starting to shut down," Cid said, "That Tron guy's trying to keep everything in balance, but the thing will soon crash."

"Then we'll go help him," Sora offered.

"Then be like the wind, lads! And lady," Merlin replied urgently, throwing his hands forward as he began to motion the group out of the door.

"Argh!" Aseles stumbled, and she gripped onto the floor, grunting.

"Hey!" Sora hurriedly before her, grabbing her shoulders and shook her gently, "Aseles, Aseles! Get up!"

Aseles felt the insides of her head twisting, her hands clutching the front of her shirt as she threw her head back. She was now lying on the ground, staring up at the ceiling with eyes squinting, the beads of sweat running down the sides of her temples. This feeling....it was gripping at her throat, and she began to feel herself pulled under, but she was not asleep...

*"You have failed attempts of retrieving Aseles, Axel."*

*"I apologize, Superior," Axel's voice boomed.*

*"What compels you to her more than your Organization...?"*

*"It's nothing-"*

*"It's discovered that you have manipulated the arena for Aseles to escape. Do you deny it?"*

*"...."*

*"You do not." Xemnas replied firmly from in front.*

*"You wouldn't understand," Axel said.*

*"My, what a shame for you." Axel looked back at Xemnas.*

*"You're-" There was a grunt of muffled screams, and then the sound of something scrambling on the marble floor. "How could you do this?"*

*"You were the prime suspect of our failures. It is time you are eliminated."*

*"What are-"*

*There was a loud bang. Two keyblades flashed in view, beauty in combat.*

*"Take him, now Namine!" Roxas yelled.*

*"I can't do anything for you Axel, but maybe Aseles can..."*

Aseles bolted up from the ground, gasping loudly as she clutched her chest from the sudden intake of the dry air. She couldn't breathe.

"Aseles, what happened?" Sora persisted, patting her face quickly.

"Axel!" Aseles shot up to her feet, swiftly banging the door open with a push as she stumbled,

directing her attention towards the Bailey.

“Aseles! Hold up!” Sora called from behind, but Aseles wasted no time in waiting for him or the others to catch up. She was running two steps up the stairs, then jerked to the right as she began to rush in the Bailey.

*“Wait for her right here. There’s nothing else I can do for you...”*

“Axel!” Aseles called out, swinging her arms from side to side as she began to jump down the stairs from the Bailey, stumbling and falling on her knees as she made it to the end. She quickly picked herself up, sliding down the slope that lead to the Ravine. There she passed by the large crystallized gems, watching her reflection in desperately in different directions, hair whipping behind her head.

*“I don’t think...I’m going to make it.”*

“Axel!” Aseles called out hoarsely, making it to the end of the Ravine as she began to roll down the small slope, and found herself coughing in the area of the Great Maw. At the end, she saw the large castle, ruined in its exterior with its mechanical face rusting away. Aseles stood up as she began to run, not once stopping to check if she was alone. She had to get to Axel, she had to save him.

Finally, running for five minutes, Aseles found herself at the bottom of the castle, and began to climb up the rocky cliff side, her hands scraping against the rocks and dirt as she coughed, waving her hands in front of her as she began to job up the slope. Finally she found herself at the top of the platform, and peered toward the large, double doors at the end, green from its old bronze. She banged her hands against the handles, and then hauled them back, making the left door creak loudly as the gears on the sides snapped. The door budged open, falling on its side as Aseles quickly backed away, the dirt kicking up and hitting her against her face. Aseles hopped over it, running into the rugged, old room. Her eyes scanned the dried up fountain at the center, and the large chandelier that hung from above, the crystals still gleaming despite their old inhabitance.

At the center of the rugged room was a figure, laying wounded as his red hair trickled with the red sea of carpet.

“A-Axel!” Aseles whispered and ran to his side. Axel groaned as Aseles gently turned him over on his side, her hands reaching to hold his face in place, “Axel, Axel, open your eyes!” Axel was mumbling incoherently, and his palms were shaking. Aseles looked about his cloak, seeing that a massive cut was made at the center of his chest.

“C’mon!” Aseles hissed to herself as her trembling fingers went into the pockets of her pants, but found nothing. Crap, she didn’t have anything on her.

“Aseles, what are you doing? Why is he here?” Aseles whirled around, seeing Sora had caught up after all, and his eyes were narrowed dangerously to Axel’s injured body.

Aseles quickly stood up, standing in front of Sora, “Sora, give me a potion for him!”

“What?! Why?!” Sora quickly retorted. He pointed toward Axel, “He’s part of the Organization, and you want to save him?”

“Sora, please! He’s the one that helped me escape!”

“He kidnapped Kairi in the first place!” Sora argued. “If it weren’t for him-“

“If you don’t give me the potion, I will take it away from you,” Aseles suddenly threatened, her

teeth gritting each other.

Sora's eyes widened, "What?"

"Give me the potion, *now*," Aseles demanded more firmly.

"You work...for the Organization don't you?"

"No, I don't!"

"Then why are you helping him?" Sora argued once more. Aseles growled, and she swiftly jabbed her hands forward, stuffing them into the closest pocket on Sora. Sora gripped her hand, prying her off as Aseles quickly backed up, glad that she had caught it on the first swipe. She hurried over toward Axel as Sora suddenly gripped the back of her shirt, hauling her back.

"Let me go!" Aseles swung around, jabbing her elbow against Sora's neck. Sora gurgled as he stumbled back, gripping his throat and gasping for the air. Aseles quickly headed over toward Axel, pulling off the cork of the potion as she began to let him drink the green contents of it. They went down and in his throat as Axel continued to drink, Aseles quickly looking back to see Sora staring at her, his eyes red with an expression of irritation and betrayal on his face.

"I'm sorry, Sora," Aseles replied, turning back toward Axel to see was now breathing normally, his fingers moving with his head slightly rolling from side to side.

"Where....UGH..." Axel groaned, his eyes rolling to the back of his head.

"C'mon, Axel," Aseles bend down firmly on her knees, and hauled Axel's left arm over her shoulders. Aseles began to steady herself, but she did not suspect that Axel weighed so much. She stumbled, but she felt more composed to stand up as she quickly looked over, seeing Sora had taken Axel's other side, standing up straight.

"Sora..." Aseles blinked, her mouth dropping.

"Let's just go," Sora quickly cut in, beginning to walk ahead.

"Where do you think you're going?" Aseles and Sora froze, both of them looking back to see a long, seven foot sword was poking at the back of Axel's neck. Aseles blinked rapidly, looking at the long hair of silver ride along the man's frame of face. His grayish eyes narrowed, examining Aseles and Sora.

"Who are you?" Sora asked immediately, but unable to move from his spot. The man twisted his blade, Aseles's eyes widening to see it was slightly cutting into Axel's cloak, making the redhead wince.

"Sephiroth," Aseles quickly replied, trying to move her feet along the carpet.

"You've heard of me. I wonder from whom," the man replied firmly, the dark, blue wing at his right side stretching upwards. His muscles tightened beneath his tattered cloak, opening wide at the bottom of his thighs, opening like that of a blooming, dead flower. His chest was chiseled and firm, but nothing was able to describe that look of rage upon his composed face. It was sinister, dark, alluring.

"Cloud," Sora replied firmly.

"You're the ones who hold those mysterious blades, am I correct?" Sephiroth asked. Aseles and Sora didn't answer. "What are your names?"

"I don't think we should be telling you," Sora answered, shifting Axel a little bit down. Aseles suddenly pushed Axel down to the ground, her body slamming on top of his as Sora slashed his keyblade out, blocking Sephiroth's blade from slashing down.

"Impressive," Sephiroth commented nonchalantly. "You should know you can have much more potential than that."

"I suggest you leave," Sora replied firmly.

"Sephiroth!" Aseles swiftly turned to the door, seeing Cloud was standing with his hands in fists, his pearls of teeth snapping down at each other.

"Cloud..." Sephiroth cooed.

"This ends here!" Cloud shouted as he drew his blade from his back.

"Pity...I don't have time today," Sephiroth suddenly threw his arm up, and in a rush of winds, Aseles and Sora closed their eyes, then peered a second later, seeing nothing but black feathers falling where Sephiroth had once stood.

"Where is he?" Sora asked.

"He's gone," Cloud answered, bitterly, placing his sword on his back again. "Damn it."

LATER:

"Give me one good reason why we shouldn't kill him," Leon questioned, eyeing Axel intently as the redhead rested on Merlin's bed in the Study. Aseles looked around, sweat-dropping to see everyone had their weapons out, ready for combat against this one, defenseless Nobody. Did Axel really pose such a threat while on the brink of death?

"Axel was the one who saved me from the Organization. Not to mention....I think they just kicked him out," Aseles replied, recalling the moments after her collapse.

"Not a bad idea to get some dirt out of him," Cid suggested, placing his hands on the arm of his chair, looking toward Axel, then Aseles.

"Sounds like a good idea," Leon nodded in agreement. "Until then, we're going to do shifts to look after him."

"I will," Aseles quickly interjected.

"No, you need some rest," Leon quickly shook his head. Aseles blinked, then looked toward Axel.

"I'll watch him..." Aseles turned to look toward Sora, though his eyes did not meet level to hers, "Go rest, Aseles."

The rest of the group began to depart as Aseles walked over toward Sora's side, "Sora...I'm sorry I did that to you....earlier."

"You just wanted to help him...." Sora shrugged, but still did not meet her gaze.

"I know you have reasons not to trust me....but Axel helped me, and I believe repaying the favor back will benefit us," Aseles replied.

Sora's face turned stern, "We'll see about that."

#### THE NEXT DAY:

With damp hair, Aseles was now sitting in the chair where Sora and Leon had guarded Axel, and it seemed he was coming to. He would begin to mumble some understandable words, and his eyes would flicker, trying to open. Aseles waited patiently as she hugged her knees, resting her back against the wooden head of the chair. Her eyes loomed over Axel's face, and reached to remove some of the fallen bangs from his forehead.

As Aseles waited in the Study, the others had surrounded themselves around the room, with Leon and Yuffie by the door, Cid on the computer, his fingers pressing madly against the keys; Aerith and Merlin shared some tea with Donald and Goofy sitting behind the staring Sora. Aseles could feel his eyes looking straight at her, and it made her very uncomfortable. He had not stopped staring since she had arrived in the room.

"You know....pictures last longer," Aseles replied, looking at him briefly.

"I need to know what your connection to the Organization is," Sora replied firmly, his arms crossed on his chest, his side resting against the end frame of the bed.

"I have no connection with them. I don't know how many times I have to tell you," Aseles replied, offended.

"You've lied to us before."

"Because of what you're doing to me right now. You're interrogating me."

"I have every right to do so."

"Shut up, Sora," Aseles swiftly bolted from her chair.

"That's enough," Leon swiftly cut in, standing in between the two. Aseles looked up to him, seeing his eyes harden. She sighed heavily as she sat back down, then Leon turned to look at Aseles, "No more questions for her. Understood?"

"But--"

"Understood?"

".....Yes."

"He's waking up," Yuffie quickly informed. Aseles turned to look at Axel, her arms open at her sides as she leaned, pressing her palms against the edge of the bed. Axel's eyes flickered more rapidly as he groaned, wincing as he began to lift his head, but placed it back down.

"Axel, can you hear me?" Aseles asked, reaching and shaking his shoulder gently.

"Hmm....what?" Axel's eyes began to waver from opening, and finally they began to focus among the ceiling. His pupils shrunk, then dilated, and began to move over toward Aseles's voice. Aseles smiled widely, seeing his perplexed face begin to collect some color to it.

"Where am I?" Axel asked finally after a few moments.

"You're in Hollow Bastion," Leon replied as he crossed his arms, looking down at Axel.

"What?" Axel asked, sitting up swiftly, but he gritted his teeth, falling back down on the bed.

"They were going to kill you, Axel," Aseles added.

"How...did you know?" Axle asked, barely able to speak through his ragged voice.

"Namine," Aseles replied. "She helped you, including Roxas..."

Axel looked back at Aseles, his hands into fists, "Roxas?" Aseles nodded. "Alright.....what do you want to know?" Aseles blinked to him, Leon rubbing his temple. "What? I don't think you just saved me to keep me alive, right?"

"Well...that was the main reason, really," Aseles replied. Axel stared at her. "I mean...you helped me escape and...."

"Caught on...did you? Heh...." Axel chuckled softly, shaking his head. "I'm an idiot."

"Why would you help us? Unless there is something for you," Sora added in. Axel looked to him, and was....just staring at him for a long period of time. Aseles inspected Axel's face, seeing this collective emotion appearing on the Nobody's face, but what bothered her was that Sora was letting it down. He was staring at Axel with much intensity; it was beginning to heat up the room.

"Ugh....damn...." Axel gripped his forehead, and began to sit up, stretching his long legs forward. He began to move them over the bed as everyone stiffened in place, a few ready for attack, but Aseles stayed in place as she looked to see Axel was merely composing himself to sit at the end of the bed, his elbows resting on his knees. His red waterfall of hair swayed on his back, some of the strands swimming over his shoulders. His aqua eyes shined as they picked themselves up, looking at Aseles specifically.

"Alright, I can see you're not joking around," Axel sighed heavily. After a pause, Aseles watched him speak with a straight face to her, "So, want to know why you have a keyblade?"

Aseles felt her heart drop, hitting the base of her body, and making everything fluctuate painfully. She could feel her heart pounding so strongly, she was sure the whole room could hear it.

"You know why?" Aseles shuddered, her lips wanting to quiver.

"I know why," Axel answered firmly, "But I won't like how your reaction will be."

"Just tell me," Aseles replied quickly, her insides twisting and turning, jumping and ripping of persistence.

Axel waited, and then he opened his mouth, "Organization XIII planned things, but as you already know of what Luxord told you, the goal was to retrieve Kingdom Hearts. However...."

"What?" Aseles asked.

Axel paused for a moment, collecting his thoughts as he held on his chin, "I don't know how they found you....but they found you, Aseles. When they did...you were literally nothing but a shell...I don't even think....that's appropriate of me to say." Axel rubbed the side of his head, the chains of his cloak clinking as he did, "Xemnas decided that it would be full advantage to use you, because you were able to hold a keyblade. I don't know how you got it....but all I know is.....is that Roxas was the one that infiltrated your pod."

"...M-My pod?" Aseles shuddered again, her eyes wide.

"You were asleep, but I don't know how long you were asleep for," Axel shook his head, looking

deeply to Aseles's face, "All I can say is....is that I'm sorry. We were always ten steps ahead of you."

Cue the world exploding.

Aseles felt rigid in her seat, uncomfortable, dirty as she looked to Axel's knees. She felt her own shaking, and she soon found herself standing up, her arms trembling. No one stopped her from walking away as she began to head to the door of the Study. Soon she was outside, and felt the cool breeze of the air hitting against her face.

What was there to believe, what was there to cry for? Aseles could feel the tears welling up, but...she did not know what she was crying for. They were always ten steps ahead of her, but why did it feel like she had no control over anything anymore? No, she had *no* control over anything...it was all controlling her. The Organization, the Hollow Bastion Committee...Aseles belonged to both of them. Organization XIII had planned this from the very beginning....

Aseles's hands turned into fists, and she threw her head back, screaming silence to the sky as she felt her hair whipping across her head. She swung her arms around as the keyblade flashed into view, but the walls and the floor were not saved from her thrashing as she began to flail around, her face red in rage, in sadness, in the whole explosion of them all within her being. She just kept swinging and swinging, breaking the bricks and the cement as she yelled at them, yelled at the world they laid on. The tears poured down her face, and felt the world spinning uncontrollably around her, thrashing her against the ground.

She felt a pair of arms grab hold of her, from preventing her from swinging, but they did not stop the silent wails from her quaking lungs. Aseles felt them, those arms, warm and tight, but why did she feel so alone?

She was the loneliest person in the world, and could feel nothing but that emptiness within her, gnawing and protruding into her flesh and bone. And to think, the person that helped her escape was the one that ended up bringing her down to this very spot, since the very beginning. Roxas knew who she was, and he acted as if he had known her for the very first time.

Aseles had lost everything, and had nothing. There was no history of her, except.....

Aseles knew she had to find the key.

Ansem the Wise.

## Awoken

As Aseles began to wake up, she could feel the dryness around her face and eyes, groaning as she reached up to wipe off the crumbs of dirt. She stretched her mouth open, rubbing off the dry pathways of tears she had prior, but she wasn't sure how long she was sleeping. Was it the next day? All she could remember were glimpses of crying, and then being led into the house.

Aseles lifted her head up properly, and proceeded to look around the room; she was the only one in bed, and it seemed that a fog approached with the morning, circling around the window frames from outside. She began to sit up, and proceeded to go take a quick shower before dressing properly into her clothes. However, Aseles winced, feeling this hurtful emotion at the pit of her stomach. It didn't feel...physical, more beyond that.

Walking down the stairs, Aseles appeared in the kitchen, but before she could walk out the door, a body was already coming inside, prying the door open. Aseles took an immediate step back, seeing it was Axel walking in.

Instead of his cloak, Axel wore a simple black shirt, with a pair of dark pants and a spiked belt around his waist. His gloves turned fingerless and short, reaching to his wrists. That river of red hair swam down his back gloriously, and a small smirk appeared on his face, though he seemed...a bit nervous of the new outfit.

"I guess....I'll never get tired of wearing black," Axel joked, though Aseles was keeping her eyes intent on where he was. Axel rolled his eyes, "I'm not going to hurt you....jeezes."

"Thanks for waking me up....at least," Aseles replied, rubbing her eyes.

"...You look like a wreck," Axel commented. Aseles huffed. "Sorry....I was sent to make sure you ate something."

"...You're babysitting me now?" Aseles raised a brow, scoffing.

Axel rolled his eyes again, rubbing the front of his forehead as he looked to her, "It seems Leon wants me to take...responsibility of what I told you yesterday..."

"Aseles." Aseles slapped a hand to her face, watching from the opening of her fingers to see Leon had just come in, with Cid behind him. Leon stopped at the top of the staircase, Cid waiting below with arms crossed. Axel stepped to the side a bit, clearing his throat as he instead began to inspect the room.

"How are you doing, Aseles?" Leon asked, "I need you to eat something."

"I'm not hungry..." Aseles replied. Leon sighed, walking a bit further in, standing a yard away from Aseles with his hands on his hips. Aseles watched him carefully, Axel looking over slightly.

"Aseles, I know you're a bit shaken, but it's important to keep good condition at times like this."

"Are they training at the Bailey?" Aseles asked instead.

"Yes, but you won't be going," Leon quickly cut in.

"Why not?" Aseles's mouth flew open.

"You're not ready to fight externally. Whatever it is you need to clear up, you won't be able to



clear it up with just swinging that keyblade around,” Leon added in.

“Why is it that I have to follow your directions?” Aseles swiftly chimed in, angry and raw. She stomped her foot on the ground, Leon’s eyes slightly widening at her approach, “I’m always taking orders from someone else! Why can’t I just do what *I* want?!”

“You’re not going if you didn’t hear me the first time,” Leon replied firmly. Cid blinked from outside as Axel was now looking to the two, his aqua eyes gleaming from Leon, to Aseles, to Leon, and to Aseles again.

“Who are you to tell me what to do?”

Leon’s eyes narrowed, “Because I say so, and I’m responsible for you.”

“Who said so? You’re not my dad!” Aseles cried back, her temper fusing.

“That doesn’t matter. If I say you can’t go, then you can’t! End of discussion,” Leon replied lastly. Aseles looked to Leon, glowering, but then as she inspected his face, she could feel the hurt she had delivered. His eyes, they frowned upon her as Aseles opened her mouth, her hand reaching forward to him.

“Leon....I.....It’s just that-“

Leon headed for the door as he closed it behind him, Cid out of sight and only leaving Axel to her company. Aseles swallowed roughly, and felt the whole world was now caving into her. Why was she so angry of Leon watching out for her? He cared about her...and she threw that right in his face.

“C’mon...you need something to eat,” Axel comforted from beside, opening a chair for Aseles. Aseles sighed as she accepted the defeat, and a few moments later, Axel was pouring her some cereal and milk with it. Aseles watched him closely, wondering how in the world he was able to do...ordinary things such as making cereal. Did Nobodies ever eat? She never grew curious as to ask. Maybe he would grow offended.

With spoon in hand, Aseles began to munch, but it somehow wasn’t settling well with her stomach with every swallow. She began to eat more slowly, though she could feel Axel’s eyes on her, his fingers drumming a bit on the table.

“....Yes?” Aseles asked, staring at him.

“Sorry, it’s just....really weird to be on this side...now,” Axel replied.

“....No kidding,” Aseles replied, taking another bite.

“When I woke up, I seriously thought I was still in the castle,” Axel scoffed, shaking his head.

“...Is this a good change?” Aseles asked, blinking to him.

“Hmm? Well.....I’m not sure...” Axel shrugged a bit, crossing his arms on the wooden table.

“What...do you mean?”

“Well....I didn’t expect to be welcomed with open arms...just getting some used to,” Axel replied, waving a hand dismissively. “Always being interrogated on where I’m going, of what I’m doing...I can’t understand why they don’t trust me....”

“Oh....” Aseles nodded slowly, taking a few more bites. Silence, then, “Axel....why did you save me?”

Axel’s face turned stern, and he shrugged, “I don’t know....”

“You said I reminded you of someone....but of whom?” Axel looked away, tapping a strong finger on the table, his chin resting on his prompted up hand. Aseles stared at him carefully, but seemed to be finding it hard to crack him. She took another gentle bite, munching slowly. Axel looked to her, but he rolled his eyes again, seeing she was still looking at him.

“Ask all you want, but I’m not going to tell you who,” Axel shook his head.

“Maybe that’s why they don’t trust you yet...” Aseles replied, beginning to swirl the contents of the cereal instead.

“Hmm?”

“You still have secrets to hide,” Aseles replied again. “But then again....we all have secrets.”

“Then you share the burden on why I have to keep it a secret,” Axel replied.

Aseles nodded slowly, “Yes.”

“I think you should go apologize to Leon though...” Axel added, rubbing the side of his head. Aseles shot a glance to him. “He was...just looking out for you. You’re a mess....and you wanted to train?”

Aseles sighed loudly, slapping both of her hands to her face, “....I know....”

“Are you finished?”

“Yes...I guess...I can’t eat anymore.”

“Go catch up to him then. He’s headed to...Ansem’s Study,” Axel added carefully. Aseles questioned on why he would say it like that, but then....it hit her.

*Unless you have known him....then I don’t think the information in store holds anything that is of value to you...*

Ansem knew of Aseles. Was it possible that....there was something in those records after all? Waiting for Aseles....calling to her, wailing for her to open them up? She had the answers to her past all along, and they were right under her nose, here in Hollow Bastion.

“Hey.” Aseles froze briefly before turning toward the door, seeing Sora was standing there, with Donald and Goofy behind him.

“Uh...” Aseles dropped her spoon, making it clatter into the bowl loudly. Axel straightened up as he rubbed the back of his head, and then looked toward Sora again. Aseles gulped, seeing Sora’s face somewhat harden, but his eyes were leveled onto her.

“Do you know where Leon is?” Sora asked.

“He’s headed toward Ansem’s Study,” Axel hinted.

“I’ll go with you guys,” Aseles replied, beginning to stand up and placing her bowl into the sink, rinsing water into it. She quickly dried her hands as she gave Axel a quick look, “Thanks for the cereal.” Axel lifted his chin as a “You’re welcome” as Aseles began to walk outside, Sora giving

her a bit of room to leave. Aseles stood beside Donald and Goofy, and they looked to her. Goofy reached forward, gripping her shoulder as Aseles looked to him.

"I'm sorry, Aseles," he added. Aseles's eyes widened, but she quickly shook it off, nodding. Goofy suddenly nudged Sora as he came into view and Sora looked to him, blinking rapidly. Goofy darted his eyes to Aseles, then to Sora as Aseles stared at the brunette. She couldn't help but feel very timid around him.

Sora looked to her, and he nodded slowly in her direction, "Sorry about.....everything to this point. I shouldn't have interrogated you like that yesterday."

"It's.....you had a reason to," Aseles replied.

Sora shook his head, "No...I didn't."

"Catch up when you can," Donald advised as he began to walk toward the pathway leading to the Bailey, Goofy following behind him after giving a small wave toward Sora and Aseles. They watched him go as Sora checked that the door toward the house was closed before turning to look at Aseles again.

"Everything of what Axel told you yesterday....You don't know...how bad I felt after treating you that way, like you weren't part of the team," Sora continued. "It was wrong of me to do....I should trust you more because....there's really nothing that you can be hiding from me. You don't....remember anything, you can't."

"You know...this isn't making me feel any better," Aseles replied, slightly slumping her shoulders.

"My point is..." Sora reached, taking her hands into his, and giving them a firm squeeze, "We'll always be here for you...no matter what. We're here for you, Aseles...it's important that you know that. Everything might seem like a disaster right now, but things will get better, I'm sure of it."

"But...what if you're wrong?" Aseles asked, eying him sternly.

Sora smiled, "Have I ever steered you wrong?"

"...No..." Aseles shook her head gently.

"The others are waiting for us," Sora smiled wider, tugging her hand. Aseles shifted in place, but began to follow as Sora began to lead her on toward the bottom steps of the Bailey.

"You're unbelievable sometimes..." Aseles added as they began to walk up the stairs.

"Hmm? Why is that?" Sora questioned, tilting his head.

"You're so cheery....even when the world might be collapsing. How do you do it?" Aseles asked as they arrived to the entrance of the Bailey, walking into the cool shade as Sora stopped momentarily, looking toward Aseles as she stood beside him. He faced her, letting go of her hand as he smiled wider again.

"Knowing that everything gets better; it's always worth it in the end," Sora replied, taking a step toward her. Aseles looked to him, feeling warm around her face as she looked at his blue sky orbs. His fingers caressed the bottom of her jaw as Aseles shivered, gripping onto his arm in reaction. Sora stared at her as Aseles felt the ground shift beneath her feet.

"W-Why are you staring at me...like that?" Aseles questioned, feeling her eyes flicker madly.

"This feeling...." Sora began to caress her cheek gently, his frame of face leaning closer to Aseles as she shuddered at his warm presence, "...it feels.....so familiar. Don't you feel it?"

Aseles shook her head slowly, her lips parting open slightly as she could feel his cool breath among her face, circling down among her neck and collarbones, "I don't...remember anything, remember?" Sora's eyes dropped momentarily to stare at her mouth, before riding back up to look at her.

Sora looked to her, and began to laugh gently, shaking his head, "Maybe it is...me, that can't remember anything."

"Donald and Goofy are waiting..." Aseles replied, taking a step back as she cleared her throat. Sora nodded slowly, and he began to lead the way as Aseles followed beside him, the two walking down the steps. Reaching the bottom step, Aseles's eyes widened, and she remembered, right then and there-

*As you can see, Sora already has someone else.*

Oh no....oh no.....

"Aseles?"

She lifted her face to look at him, and felt the bones in her face quiver.

*Does that not enrage you? Does it not pick at your soft heart?*

Kairi.....Aseles had forgotten about Kairi. In those moments...nothing else existed. No, she blew it. She had dug her own grave.

*You are in love with this wielder, but nothing you will do will cease his true feelings.*

Aseles slapped her hands to her face, groaning loudly as she dropped her body to look down at the ground. Sora hurried to look at her, shaking the back of her shoulder. Aseles could feel the turmoil within her stomach, and it was pulsing into her blood, making her sick.

"Aseles, what's wrong?"

"Um...I think we made Donald and Goofy wait too long, is all," Aseles cleared her throat, standing up straight again as she looked to Sora.

Sora blinked, but nodded, smiling gently, "Then let's get going." Aseles punched her stomach once Sora looked away, and proceeded to follow him in silence as the two made it toward the Postern.

"Donald, Goofy!" Sora blinked in surprise as the two were standing at the center of the Postern, Aseles quickly picking her head up as the two ran up the metal steps. Surrounding the area were low, weak beams of light radiating.

"It's the defense system," Sora commented, looking around as the beams of light among the floor binged lowly in energy.

"Looks like Tron is having trouble," Donald added with a firm nod. Running down the stairs, the group began to make their way quickly around the halls until they reached the front of Ansem's Study. Walking in, Aseles's eyes instantly looked about, remembering that this room seemed to hold her answers....but it would have to wait. Her eyes averted toward the hole in the wall leading to the Computer Room.

“Sora!” Leon’s voice rang from the room, and the group began to hurriedly make their way, until they all fell back, dodging Leon’s backswing of his blade. The Heartless Leon had tumbled over the edge of the glass floor rocketed down toward the floor below, their outlines of bright red lights gleaming and turning to ash once they hit the ground. Leon turned to look at the arriving group, and then proceeded to walk forward, signaling them to follow.

“Seems that Tron can’t hold it much longer. You’ll have to dispatch of the problem inside,” Leon replied.

“Were those...Heartless?” Aseles questioned.

“From Tron’s world,” Sora sighed heavily, shaking his head as he followed and stood right beside Leon who stood by the computer screen. On it Aseles could see a tab opened, and reading **WARNING!** on the screen.

“The MCP is already hacking into the town's defense system. Right now, Yuffie and the others are taking care of the Heartless in other parts of the districts in town,” Leon answered.

"Let's get going then!" Goofy said.

"Right!" Sora answered.

Aseles quickly cut in, turning to look at Leon, “Leon, I-“

"There's no time, you have to get moving," Leon interrupted, looking at Aseles briefly before turning his eyes to the keys of the computer again. Aseles frowned.

"**IGNORANT USERS. OBEY THE MCP,**" Sora read on the computer screen.

"You guys ready?" Leon asked as Aerith suddenly came into view, standing beside Leon.

“You must go, hurry,” she advised. Sora gave a thumb up as Donald and Goofy stood side by side with him. The trio looked to Aseles, signaling her to follow as Aseles gulped, but did so. She looked ahead, hearing Leon click a button behind them and moving out of the way while he pulled Aerith with him. Aseles watched the large portal at the other side brighten, and she squinted her eyes. There was a bright zoom of a sound as the beam shot out, Aseles feeling herself freezing. She began to feel this odd sensation along the outside of her skin, and then she saw nothing but darkness.

A moment later, Aseles opened her eyes, blinking roughly as she shook her head. She was instantly blinded with large beams of blue, neon lights, and she had to squint her eyes until she adjusted them to look around. It seemed...she was in a lit world of some digitalized it seemed. Her eyes widened as she looked around, and then noticed that the others were standing up, and had taken a transformation of their own upon the world. They didn’t seem too surprised, but then Aseles remembered that they were already here once.

Aseles looked to herself, seeing her outfit consisted of a helmet, with light sabers protruding downwards at the back of her head. Her hair looked gray in this world, curling underneath her jaw and riding down her shoulders slightly. Her whole body was covered in a sleek type of material, with armor around her forearms, thighs and calves. At the center of her chest was a small gem of yellow light, blue neon outlines running along the sides of her legs, around her thighs, wrists and abdomen, and along the collarbones of her neck.

“Where...are we?” Aseles, looking about the small room they appeared in. It seemed to hold some sort of cell, the outside leading to some path upwards at the right. However, Sora directed his

attention toward a standing board at the end of the room, a portal holding several codes it seemed.

"Let's go to the game grid, he might be there," Sora said as he began to push some buttons. Goofy collected Aseles's wrist as she was pulled, and placed in-between him and Donald. Sora clicked a button, and suddenly the whole scenery began to change in a fast blur of lights. Aseles blinked rapidly to adjust her eyes, and then found herself on a large platform, a grid if seemed, closed off with tall, neon walls reaching for the dark sky above. There were a ton of Heartless around, and Aseles wasted no time in striking the two that advanced in her direction.

However....

Aseles picked up her keyblade in view, staring at it as it was outlined in its own blue, neon lights. She grimaced slightly, remembering what Axel had told her about it. Did....she dare give it up? What was the point in having it, if it only seemed to be aiding Xemnas's plans?

"Tron!" Sora yelled. Aseles whirled around, seeing a man in a gray suit, outlined in blue was in the middle of the Heartless chaos, and was trying desperately to cut himself off from the danger. This guy was the only one fighting the Heartless in here?

"Watch out!" Tron yelled back. Behind, Aseles felt the air whir, and she only caught a glimpse before she was yanked down to the ground. A bright beam of blue light shot out, pixelating the ground behind her as she stared up at the advancing, lavender-lit Heartless. Its large body stomped on the ground as it made contact, and it's eyes contorted deviously as it began to whir again, the center of its body rotating as it began to beam another attack.

Sora, Donald, and Goofy ran forward with their weapons out, fighting the large Heartless as Aseles hurried over to the one called Tron, helping him striking against the few Heartless that were left to destroy. She noticed that he was fighting with some sort of rotating, sharp disk from his back, but didn't question it as the numbers began to die down. Finally, the last Heartless was destroyed as Tron and Aseles turned, looking to see Sora deliver the final blow to the large Heartless.

"Thanks for your help," Tron said, extending his hand out toward Aseles, "My name is Tron. What's yours?"

"Um, Aseles," Aseles extended her own hand out, and shook his firmly back, "It's nice to meet you."

Tron smiled, and then turned his direction toward the approaching Sora, Donald and Goofy, "I'm very glad to see you guys."

"You as well. Tron, how can we destroy the MCP?" Sora asked.

"Oh, right! First, we have to get to the Tower. As I have been advised, the one named Leon should be dropping a CD for the defense system," Tron said, leading the way off the grid as the rest followed.

Aseles followed as closely as she could, and was able to feel the throbbing from underneath her suite. She looked over to the others, seeing they didn't seem to struggle to keep up with Tron. The lack of training was getting the best of her....

As they continued to advance, Aseles found herself settled upon moving platforms, looking below to the dark abyss, relieved that she didn't have to know where it led to, considering she wasn't planning on falling in anytime soon. Upon the fourth moving platform, Aseles was now standing on a platform, leading up to a ramp and cutting off in several directions. The whole placed was lit

in blue color, and she wondered how such a world could be hiding in a computer.

"Aseles, you alright?" Sora asked.

"I'm fine," Aseles nodded, looking around the large place. The sky was so dark, but it emphasized the place extremely. It was truly amazing, but the fact remained that the group was short in time limit, and she hurried to keep up with the others who had begun moving again. Tron seemed to have taken a sharp right, and was heading inside a large building of some sort. Aseles looked about, and then hurried inside, seeing the large room tower over a hundred feet, curving inwards toward the center of the ceilings with beams of light raining down at the sides toward the walls. At the end was some sort of door, and Aseles guessed the main contents of the Tower were in there.

"We can't waste any more time. The longer we take, the MCP gets stronger," Tron advised, running inside as the four followed behind him. Suddenly, the air whirled to life, and Aseles instantly dropped herself on the ground, the blast of a beam shooting forward and missing her head by a foot. She shot her eyes up, seeing two, lavender-lit Heartlesses, the two taking aim.

"Split!" Sora shouted as Aseles rolled out of the way, finding herself paired up with Donald as they faced on Heartless, the other three facing the second one.

"I'll stun, you go for it!" Donald nodded. Aseles looked to him, but nodded as she dodged out of the way again, seeing the Heartless smack its large, curved legs where she once stood. Donald aimed, a ricochet of Thundaga spells bouncing off the tip of his wand as they began to dance around the Heartless. The Devastator Heartless jolted in place, and Aseles wasted no time in smacking the hell out of from every angle, making sure to cut off its limbs first. The Heartless began to jolt in place, its eyes narrowing as it began to recoil back. It smashed its center body against Aseles, but Aseles made sure to keep her body firm in place.

She held the Heartless in place, "FIRE!" A ring of bright, blue flames began to circulate around her as the Heartless whirled in pain, and finally it crashed onto the floor where Donald began to throw his own bursts of flames. Finally, the Heartless pixelated into dust as Aseles grabbed her knees, breathing deeply. Looking behind, the second Devastator had been taken care of, and the group continued to advance to the entrance of the Tower.

"Leon should be sending the disk any minute now," Tron said as he walked onto the curving. At the center of the tranquil room was a cylinder platform, and Tron proceeded to stand on it, looking up to the bright light shining down from above. Aseles walked ahead as Sora, Donald and Goofy stayed by the entrance. Aseles blinked among the room, but began to wonder how Leon was able to transport something in here.

As if Leon knew of Aseles's thoughts, the ceiling blinked in a flash of light, and Tron proceeded to remove the disk on his back. He placed it above his head, and let the disk glide upwards toward the bright light. Aseles watched carefully as the disk suddenly began to radiate in a bright flash of blue light instead of its gray, and began to ride back down the wave of light and into Tron's hands once more.

"It's...strange," Tron said, his fingers traveling over his disk.

"That's Merlin's magic!" Donald smirked.

"Look, your friends even gave a power booster for me, and it has the routines for the Solar Sailer," Tron said, placing his disk away on his back as he began to climb down the platform.

"Solar Sailer?" Aseles asked.

"Yes, it will lead us to the MCP, so let's go to the simulation hanger," Tron said. Aseles blinked, slightly confused. Tron chuckled, "You'll see."

MOMENTS LATER:

"Whoa!" Sora's mouth dropped as Donald, Goofy and Aseles stood in awe, unable to believe their eyes. There stood a resembling flying machine, two large screens stretched out in front of it, seeming for controlling its direction. Nothing seemed to be holding it except for a beam of light.

"Hurry, we can't waste time!" Tron said as four rushed onto the platform, and began to stand inside the device. Could Tron really control something this big?

Suddenly, the floor rumbled as Aseles shot her eyes forward, seeing a beam of light shoot out from the front of the machine, and extending to something unseen in the distance. The sides of the platform flew open as a set of clear wings rose from behind, propelling the Sailer forward from its port. It rushed forward in a steady pace, the rays of light passing by the sides as Aseles hurried over to the side, looking down at the flying floor of the grid below. Pretty cool ship.

Purple rays of light shone horizontally across the distance, as it too glowed on the ship's grid floor. Sora followed to stand beside Aseles's side, their eyes direction around the alien contraption.

"Sweet!" Sora grinned fully.

"WOW...." Donald said, his mouth opened as Goofy nodded from the other side.

"Hey, you've got to keep a lookout!" Tron said suddenly.

"For what?" Aseles blinked.

"The MCP of course. They're not going to just let us waltz in," Tron said, his hands taking full control of the levers and buttons in front.

"Oh, sorry," Sora sweat dropped, smiling nervously. Aseles stood rigid, and she heard the sound of something whirring in the air again. She instantly looked above, but had to look ahead of her at the fallen Heartlesses that had climbed upon.

"He had to jinx it," Sora sighed, flashing out his keyblade and rotating it in his hand, "Everyone take one!" Sora charged as Aseles swung her own keyblade in hand, striking it down, but missed the motorcycle Heartless it as spun out of harm's way. Aseles quickly followed behind it, seeing its red, dagger arms strike against each other, creating sparks. Aseles's eyes widened as she quickly threw her body back, her knees bent as the daggers rotated above her. Aseles threw her body forward, twisting her torso as she swung her keyblade across. It caught the back of the Heartless as it made it topple over the edge. Aseles quickly stood correctly, catching her keyblade in hand, but her mouth dropped to see that new Heartless had infiltrated the platform.

"Watch out, the platform will fall if it's too heavy!" Tron said.

"That's makes it so much better!" Aseles shouted, irritated as she charged again, striking against two Strafer Heartlesses, turning them to dust at her feet.

"Watch out!" Goofy said another Devastator appeared, its four, round legs stomping against the platform. The sailor began to suddenly drop in height as the group wobbled to keep steady. The Devastator pulled its two, front legs up, and began to form a beam at the center of its body.

"There's more!" Donald yelled. The ship shook further, the altitude quickly diminishing.



"We're almost there!" Tron called from ahead. Aseles watched as the beam began to grow in strength, and then at the Heartless. Her eyes widened as she quickly ran forward, dodging the Heartless in her way as she stopped behind Goofy. She gripped his wrist that held the shield, and he yelped from the suddenly yank.

"Hey, over here!" Aseles tossed her keyblade forward, hitting the Devastator at the side of its head. Her keyblade dropped at the floor beneath it, and it redirected its beam toward her and Goofy.

"Don't let go!" Aseles advised to Goofy as he nodded quickly. The two braced themselves as the beam shot outwards, and struck against Goofy's shield. Aseles grunted as she held the shield in place with him, and the two began to redirect the beam around. Donald and Goofy, along with Tron ducked onto the ground as the beam struck against every Heartless there was on the platform, throwing them back and over the edge of the Solar Sailer. The machine began to elevate back up to its height, and stop abruptly. The whole group rolled forward to a stop as Aseles picked herself up, seeing that the Sailer had made port to its final destination. She looked to see a platform, and quickly pulled herself out of the machine, shaking slightly from the sudden turn of events.

"Well.....that was fun," Sora smiled nervously, following out second with Tron, Donald and Goofy last.

"At least we made it," Tron said, rubbing his upper arms firmly.

"Is it in there?" Goofy asked, pointing down the swerving ramp.

"Yes. The MCP is waiting in there," Tron nodded slowly, "Most likely, Sark is also there."

"Sark?" Aseles blinked.

"Not a good guy," Sora cleared his throat.

"C'mon, we can't waste any more time," Tron nodded quickly as he began to run down the ramp.

"Hold on!" Sora followed closely behind, along with the rest of his group bringing up the rear. Inside the crevice of the wall, Aseles skidded to a stop, looking around to see a ring of a platform surrounding what seemed to be a bright crimson, rotating hourglass at the center. Standing before it was a man, outlined in red. He turned to face the group, and instantly by his scowling face, Aseles knew this would not end well.

"If you have come to destroy the MCP, it's too late! He's already hacking into the Defense System of that pathetic, User world," Sark smirked widely.

"We must destroy the MCP now before it's too late!" Tron looked to Sora.

"The disk!" Sora replied back.

"Sora, I need you to assist me," Torn said.

"You bet!" Sora said as Tron motioned Sora to follow him as the two began to run to the side of the rounding platform.

"No you will not!" Sark cut in. Donald, Goofy and Aseles instantly stepped forward, blocking Sark's way from advancing further.

"You gotta pass us first!" Donald said.

"You aren't going nowhere near Tron and Sora!" Goofy encouraged.

"Sark, destroy them!" the MCP shouted. Sark growled as he withdrew the disk from behind his back, and it whirled to deadly life as the three prepared themselves. Sark struck forward as Aseles dodged, seeing the disk spark against the ground. Aseles held her keyblade in front of her as Sark advanced on her, swinging his disk to and fro. Aseles deflected every attack, and swung her keyblade forward, sending Sark back against the ground. Donald advanced as he pinned Sark's feet to the ground with a Blizzaga spell.

"Destroy them, at once!" the MCP shouted from the spinning hourglass. Was he in there?

Suddenly a bolt of red lighting shot out from the red hourglass, hitting Sark directly. Donald, Goofy and Aseles immediately backed away, Aseles's eyes widened to see the Blizzard spell immediately shatter. Sark stood up, the red bolts surrounding him as he began to triple in size, towering easily over the group.

"Oh boy..." Aseles groaned, seeing Sark observing his hands, grinning widely at his transformation.

"Thank you, master," he replied and he then looked at the trip, his hands turning into fists.

"What do you think we should do?" Goofy asked nervously.

"Run!" Donald said, motioning to run already.

"No, we won't leave!" Aseles cut in, "We'll buy time for Sora and Tron!"

"Aseles is right! Come on, Donald!" Goofy said. Donald only groaned as the three charged to Sark, striking him at his feet with everything in their power. Sark simply began to move his foot forward, and stomped downward at the trio. Aseles felt herself being thrown back, falling against the ground harshly. She groaned, looking up to see that a hand was reaching down to grab her. Aseles flailed to stand up, but she was gripped, and could feel her body being squished severely.

"AGH!" Aseles cursed, kicking forward.

"You have come to destroy the MCP's plans. You must be derezzed," Sark's voice boomed.

"I don't like the sound of that," Aseles kicked more. She gritted her teeth, then quickly ducked as Donald's thunder spell shot above her head, striking Sark on his face. Sark yelled in pain as his grasp fell, making Aseles fall toward the ground. Goofy was quickly below her as he caught her in his arms, the two falling to the ground.

"Thanks, Goof!" Aseles helped him stand up. The two then joined Donald, attacking Sark on the legs and feet. Sark yelled in further pain again as he swung his arms around, the three dodging them perfectly. Suddenly, his arm swung swiftly, catching the three in an attack. Aseles grunted as she felt herself fly over, and for a moment she thought she was going to fall in the pit below the spinning hourglass. To their luck, they crashed against the wall, Donald landing on his rear and Goofy on his head. Aseles looked up as she fell on her side, suddenly seeing Sark was advancing to the duo at the far side.

"Come on!" Aseles stood as she began to run around the gap, Donald and Goofy behind her, but at this rate of running, Aseles would not catch up. Sora turned to look at the advancing Sark, his hands holding his keyblade steady in front of him and pointing toward the MCP. Tron was beside him, narrowing his eyes in concentration as he began to pixelate some sort of weapon around Sora with the help of his disk. They were planning on breaking the barrier of the MCP.

“We’re not going to make it!” Donald shouted. Sark began to pick up his large foot, beginning to tower it over Sora and Tron. Sora shot his eyes up to it, his eyes wide as Tron began to quickly assemble the attack as fast as he could. The gap was too wide.....

Aseles gritted her teeth, swinging her keyblade behind her as she made it face the wall. She yelled angrily as the burst of red leapt out, making her hair curve up in sharp edges around her face. Her whole outfit had turned to a bright red as a large beam of red hit against the wall, and throttled Aseles across the gap, her body quickly passing by the hourglass. Her eyes directed to Sark as she growled, his eyes looking up too slow to catch Aseles’s spinning tip of her keyblade.

“Sark!” the MCP cried out.

“Take, THIS!” Aseles swung her keyblade across, catching Sark right at the center of his forehead. The giant wailed as he began to flail around, his body hitting against the wall as he suddenly began to topple over the edge. Aseles quickly pulled her keyblade out as she leapt forward, slamming herself against the ground as Sark fell within the darkness below the MCP, his screams dying in a last echo.

“Aseles!” Aseles looked up, her Red State instantly died down to see Donald and Goofy rushing to her. Aseles looked toward Sora and Tron, seeing them with relived smiles.

"Ignorant users! Now you've crossed the line!" the MCP roared, and it was there Aseles noticed that the hourglass was the MCP itself. Its red eyes narrowed toward the group as Tron continued to hold the disk in place, and Sora’s keyblade beginning to radiate that much brighter. The beam contained in his weapon shot out, and began to penetrate the outer wall of the MCP. The MCP began to groan as red alarms blared among the area.

“NoooOOooooOO!” the MCP hollered as Sora and Tron kept their positons steady. Aseles ducked her head along with Donald and Goofy as a burst of air and bright light flashed from the center. There was a whir in the air, and a few moments later, Aseles opened her blinking eyes fully, looking to see the hourglass at the center of the gap was gone, leaving nothing but an empty abyss at the bottom of the pit.

"Sora! Tron!" Donald and Goofy yelled. They both rushed forward as Aseles hurried behind, seeing them unconscious.

"Hey, Tron, snap out of it!" Goofy patted his helmet loudly.

“H-Huh?” Tron groaned, stumbling to sit up.

“You’re alright,” Aseles sighed in relief.

“OW!” Sora grumbled, gripping onto his head as he shot his eyes to Donald, “Why did you hit me?!”

"You wouldn't wake up," Donald said, a pout on his face.

"Well you didn't have to hit me so hard either!" Sora argued. Tron stood up as Aseles helped him, his eyes looking around as Sora was next to stand, darting his eyes to Donald before turning to look around the room as well.

“The...MCP?” Tron asked.

“It’s gone!” Sora cheered, throwing a fit in the air.

Tron smiled widely, looking toward the group that stood around him, “Thank you, Sora, Donald,

Goofy, Aseles, for helping me destroy the MCP.”

“Showed him not to mess with Users, huh?” Sora smirked.

"Hey, if it weren't for you, Hollow Bastion wouldn't be the same anymore," Goofy said.

"Not the same anymore..." Tron whispered, his hand on his chin.

"What?" Sora asked.

"Um, nothing. So, I'm thinking you're going back to your User world, correct?" Tron asked. The four nodded. "Thank you again, friends," Tron suddenly rushed to Sora, giving him a hug.

Aseles, Donald, and Goofy merely stared as Sora stood somewhat surprised, his arms open by his sides, but he gave Tron a pat on the back nonetheless. Tron smiled as he then gave Donald and Goofy a hug as well, saving Aseles for last. Aseles smiled widely as she hugged him tightly, and let him go. Tron patted the top of her head, looking down at her as Aseles looked past her bangs.

“We’ll see each other again, someday,” Tron smiled widely, taking a step back, his back facing the gap. Sora, Donald and Goofy smiled widely as Aseles tilted her head in concern.

“Why does...it sound like you’re leaving?” Aseles blinked.

Tron looked to her, “I’m not going anywhere...” He smiled wider as he suddenly began to run back.

“Tron!” Sora threw his hand forward, seeing Tron had leapt right into the abyss. The four hurried over to the edge, looking over and giving each other a shocked glance.

"Tron!" Sora called out along with Donald. Tron was not to be heard or seen in the darkness, and the four backed a step away, saddened of Tron's sudden action.

“Is he...going to be alright?” Aseles blinked.

“...He’ll be fine...” Sora nodded once, “I think....”

“He was right though, he’ll never leave,” Goofy smiled firmly. The group turned to look at him, seeing him point to the center of his chest, “He’ll always be right here.”

“Yeah...” Sora smiled widely back, “C’mon...let’s head back.”

LATER:

Aseles blinked rapidly again, groaning from the sudden intake of different colors. She looked to find herself in the Computer Room, looking to see Aerith standing by, along with Yuffie and Leon.

"Hey, you're back!" Aerith clapped.

"Thanks to you, the Hollow Bastion Defense System is back up!" Yuffie cheered, throwing her arms up in the air. However....

"What's wrong?" Leon asked.

"Tron, he's gone," Donald said.

"He jumped and we didn't even see it," Sora said.

"Nonsense!" The four suddenly picked up their heads to look at the computer, hearing.... Tron's voice!? Sora was the first to rush to it, looking at the blank grayish plaid screen.

"Tron?" Goofy asked.

"Yes! It's me!" Tron said, giving a small laugh.

"How did you get in there?" Donald asked.

"I jumped into the computer's main program," Tron said.

"Really?!" Sora asked with his hands slapping accidentally onto the keys of the computer.

"Stop that! I'm ticklish!" Tron said, laughing.

Sora grew a grin, "You are? Well take this!" Sora started to hit all the keys on the computer as Tron began to laugh. Oh boy....Sora....only Sora.

"W-Wait, I need to show you something!" Tron said, clearing his throat as he began to press several buttons on the screen.

"Huh, what is it?" Sora asked, tilting his head.

"I wanted to show you how Hollow Bastion was before," Tron said.

"How was it before?" Aseles asked.

"Head outside," Tron said. The four exchanged looked as Sora took the lead, then Yuffie, Aerith, and Leon following behind. Finally out on the Postern, Sora's eyes traveled among the area leading down, his eyes wide as Aseles followed suite.

White small twinkling orbs were falling from the sky, falling onto the ground and group. Aseles looked about, unsure where this was all coming from. The floor suddenly began to dissolve and shine that she was able to see her own reflection on it. She could hear the sounds of trickling water from somewhere nearby. The broken walls among the area were beginning to fix themselves back up as they were soon decorated with wonderful, green vines. The clouds that usually drifted in front of the sun were now cleared as the rays struck down upon the area.

Aseles's eyes redirected themselves at the side, spotting Leon standing with his arms crossed, and his eyes overlooking the place. Aseles cleared her throat as she advanced to him, seeing his eyes glide down to look at her.

"Leon....sorry about...what happened earlier," Aseles began. "I know you were looking out for me, it's just--"

"I know it's confusing for you right now..." Leon knelt before her, looking up at her. Aseles blinked, but felt relieved to find his hands holding onto her shoulders, "But just know, deep in your heart, that you have people who want to help you."

"Yes, my friends," Aseles nodded.

Leon smiled wider as he stood up properly, "No..."

"No?" Aseles blinked. She suddenly felt Leon's hands turn her around, making her face forward to the recreated world. Aseles felt her spirits lift above the sky as she smiled wider, feeling the corner of her eyes trickle at Leon's next words.

"You have a family, here in Radiant Garden."

## The Puzzle Piece

The joyous moment of founding Radiant Garden was still fluttering in the air. The sun was high in the sky, radiating its glorious rays upon that of the glittering floor of the town. The Market Place was booming with residence, with the shops open for all ages. Aseles was walking along the shops with Sora and the rest of the gang, Donald and Goofy occasionally going inside the Armory Shop. Sora stuck somewhat close to Aseles's side, though she didn't mind. His presence on its own was warming....but the fact remaining that she was developing something for him was slightly bothering her.

"Sora," Leon called from in front and Sora hurried forward, looking over the counter of a shop to pick out some supplies for the trip. Meanwhile, Aseles was left alone, and she began to wander among the crowd, her eyes glancing around the busy intersection.

"Ouf!" Aseles quickly caught the running boy that had rammed into her, looking past his dark hair to see it was the boy from before that Leon had greeted. His dark eyes looked up toward Aseles as Aseles smiled at him, but caught his worried expression.

"Hey, are you alright?" Aseles asked.

"Um-I-Hi," the boy rambled, but his eyes began to dart behind him. Aseles followed his jumpy gaze, seeing that two approaching, taller boys had followed Stan. They shot their eyes toward him as Stan quickly rounded Aseles, standing behind her. Aseles looked to him, then looked forward, but had to immediately perk her face up to see the taller boys were now standing close in front of her.

"Yeah?" Aseles asked, raising a brow.

"Stand aside, we need to talk to that pipsqueak," the first boy announced, his bright eyes glaring down toward Stan as if Aseles was not even there.

"I'm afraid not," Aseles narrowed her eyes, crossing her arms firmly on her chest, raising a brow to the two.

"He said move it," the second pronounced angrily.

Aseles shook her head slightly, "No....I don't think so." She grabbed her chin in place, tsking at the two, "Yeah...no...I'm not going to move."

"Why you-!" Aseles swiftly swung her arm, and out flashed her keyblade, the head of it pressed against the neck of the boy who had stepped forward. He gulped as his apple hit against the front of the keyblade, his eyes stared at the neck of the keyblade, and then shifted up to look at Aseles directly in the eyes.

"I said I wasn't moving. I don't think you understood the words that were coming out of my mouth," Aseles replied firmly, pushing her keyblade forward, making the boy gurgle a bit.

"S-Sorry about that..." the second boy quickly clasped his hand against the first boy's shoulder, pulling him back as the two began to quickly walk back, and turned a corner into an alleyway and disappearing from sight.

Aseles smiled as she turned, looking to Stan who was looking up to her, "There, now you're safe!" She patted the top of his head eagerly, and she proceeded to wag her finger at him, "Don't get into any more trouble, okay?"

“O-Okay...thank you,” Stan nodded quickly.

“Um....it was Stan, right?” Aseles asked, calling off her keyblade and holding her chin in thought.

“Yes. What’s yours?” Stan asked.

“Mine is Aseles, it’s very nice to meet you,” Aseles smiled warmly, holding out her hand to him. Stan glanced at it momentarily before smiling himself, and shook it firmly twice before letting go.

“Thanks...those guys have been bugging me and my friends for a while now,” Stan replied.

“If they ever bug you again, just tell them the key wielder is coming and they’ll be running still they get to the edge of the world,” Aseles chuckled softly.

Stan smirked, nodding keenly, “I will! Thanks!”

“Aseles!” She blinked, darting her eyes behind her to see Leon and Sora waving her to come over.

“I’ll see you later,” Aseles replied to Stan who waved to her as she began to head toward the two. With Stan approaching a couple of kids at the side, Aseles watching him begin to lead the group of four into an alleyway, and they were now out of sight. Aseles now turned her attention toward Leon and Sora, Leon scoffing to her when she was in front.

"You sure can pick a fight," Leon commented.

“Oh....uh.....did you...see that?” Aseles sweat-dropped, rubbing her cheek.

“Which reminds me, I think it’s time you get some training done on your own, don’t you think so?” Leon asked as he began to lead the way toward the exit of the Market Place. “Mind getting the rest of the supplies, Sora?”

“No problem at all,” Sora beamed as he retrieved the paper bag Leon was carrying, “I’ll fill up the gummi ship with Donald and Goofy.”

“Thanks. Come, Aseles,” Leon beckoned as Aseles waved to Sora and vice versa as Sora turned his direction toward the Armory Shop. Aseles began to follow Leon out of the Market Place and into the maze of houses, sticking close beside Leon as she looked up to him.

“I’ve never seen so many people. Were they all here to begin with?” Aseles questioned.

“Some are from here, while others are from Traverse Town,” Leon replied, retrieving his blade from his back as the two began to walk up the stairs toward the Bailey.

“Traverse Town?”

“Yes. People who are stranded recently from their home world show up there, like you. You could say its haven, but it’s not really a place to call home. So, Yuffie and I bring them here,” Leon smiled, flicking his blade down, readying the ammo inside.

“Oh....I see,” Aseles blinked. Leon nodded. Aseles looked to him, and then dropped her gaze toward the floor. She could feel her feet slowing down, and Leon turned to look at her.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Leon....you said you found me in an alleyway, right?” Aseles looked back up to him.



Leon inhaled deeply, hidden in the cool shade of the Bailey as he nodded, "Yes."

"There was nothing else with me?"

"You had your keyblade on you when we did...but that was about it," Leon replied.

"Do you think....Ansem knows something...about me?"

"Ansem the Wise?"

"Mhmm..."

"Hmm..." Leon held his chin in thought, walking further in as Aseles followed behind him. The two were now standing at the edge of the balcony, looking out toward the lit horizon in the distance. The wind slightly blew as Aseles sighed from it, shutting her eyes momentarily before opening them again, and looking to Leon.

"It's hard to say," Leon replied finally after a pause, "But we'll never know for sure unless he was actually here." Or the records....

"Alright. So, how much training are we going to do?" Aseles cleared her throat, swinging a leg over as Leon jumped into the edge of the balcony, jumping off as he landed on the ground below. He looked up to her as she swung her second leg over, his blade planted into the soil beside his feet.

"Think you can go for a couple of hours?" Leon asked as he stretched his arms up to Aseles. Aseles gritted her teeth, jumping forward as she let go. She found herself dropping down, blinking madly as she felt Leon's strong hand catch her waist, and place her feet down on the ground in front of him.

"Thank you. Um....maybe....two at best," Aseles nodded, holding her arm out as her keyblade flashed out in sight. She looked to it, and slightly frowned from its appearance.

"What's wrong?" Leon placed a hand on her shoulder.

"It kind of....bothers me...that I have this," Aseles replied truthfully, lowering her keyblade down as the head of it touched the ground.

"Why do you say that?"

"It ties me to the Organization....I don't know how worse it can get really," Aseles sighed heavily.

"Hey." Leon and Aseles looked up, seeing Axel was leaning on the balcony above, his arms crossed on the ledge with his eyes gleaming down to the two. His river of red hair flowed down over his shoulders, resting along his collarbones as the rest of it lay on his back.

"Hey, Axel," Aseles waved to him with her keyblade.

"You guys preparing for some training?" Axel rested his chin in hand.

"As a matter of fact, yes," Leon replied, "Did you want to join us?" Axel's eyes widened as Aseles blinked widely to Leon. Leon looked to her, "Is there a problem?"

"Well-NO. It's just.....you know, memories of Axel almost killing me will just....come back fresh in my mind is all...." Aseles scratched her head, looking to the side to see Axel approaching, having landed from the fall above.

“No mission this time, this is all for the purpose of making you stronger, even if it brings back.....those memories fresh,” Axel replied, smirking slightly.

“Yes...that makes me feel so much better,” Aseles sighed.

“Alright, we’ll divide up the time: one hour with Axel, and one hour with me. Sound good?”

“Very good,” Axel cracked his knuckles in response, “Do I go first?”

“Just don’t push it,” Leon sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Me, push it?....Only a little,” Axel smirked wider in response.

“Great...great...” Aseles mumbled to herself, wanting to smack herself with her own keyblade. Axel began to give some distance as Aseles did the same, and then she faced him, keyblade ready in hand. Leon placed himself at the far side, crossing his arms as he looked between the two.

“Ready?” Axel called out. Aseles nodded timidly, and she gulped when she saw Axel’s arms shoot out at the sides, his palms opened widely as bursts of hot flames ran around his fingers and wrists. In a flash, his Chakrams were in possession, and Aseles felt her stomach flip at the sight of them.

“Just like old times...” Aseles gritted her teeth, charging.

LATER:

“You know...this is really weird.”

“What is?” Aseles mumbled softly.

“Me giving you a piggy back ride...” Axel commented, his hands holding onto the bottom curves of Aseles’s legs around his sides.

“You didn’t have to...” Aseles mumbled, resting her forehead against the top of his back. She could feel every muscle within her throbbing and twitching, the sore pulls running along her shoulders and sides, especially in her thighs. The air of the night was drowning upon her skin, cooling the heat among her neck and hands.

“Of course I did, you could barely stand up, and how you were going to get back?”

“...Crawled my way...” Aseles mumbled once more.

“C’mon, we’re here. Think you can stand?” Axel stood in front of the door leading to the house, his eyes gazing back to look at her. Aseles nodded slowly as Axel began to bend down, letting her pressured soles touch the ground. Aseles winced but nodded him a thanks as Axel stood up straight again, turning to her as he opened the door for her.

“Thanks, Axel,” Aseles breathed out, holding onto her abdomen gently with a spread hand.

“No problem. You’re heading out tomorrow morning, or so I hear,” Axel scratched the back of his head.

“Aseles.” She picked up her head to look to the side, seeing Sora was approaching. Axel straightened up as he looked to Aseles, gave her a quick salute of a finger, and began to make his way back toward Merlin’s Study around the corner. Aseles watched him go, then turned to look at Sora who had approached, his blue eyes glazing to where Axel left, then they turned to look at

her.

“Whoa....are you alright? You...look like you’ve been roughed up,” Sora commented, quirking his mouth to one side nervously.

“I was...training for Leon and Axel. Two hours turned into four.....and a half...” Aseles sighed out heavily, rubbing her thighs gingerly before retrieving her hands back again with a wince.

“I’ll help you inside,” Sora replied as he wrapped an arm around Aseles’s waist. Aseles flinched, but she nodded for him to proceed as she slumped her arm over his shoulder.

“I’ll bring you some water after,” Sora replied as he began to help Aseles up the stairs, but he was basically carrying her up, his other arm leaning down and holding the back of her leg.

“Ow....” Aseles moaned, gritting her teeth as she held onto the wall for support, but found herself climbing upwards now. They entered the hallway, and Sora entered the four-bed room, “Where are...ugh, Donald and Goofy?”

“They’re fixing up the gummi ship at the moment. I’ll be helping them after I get you your water,” Sora smiled as he let Aseles sit on her bed. She sighed heavily again, relieved to feel the sheets against her rear, though she couldn’t help but feel completely dirty. Sora was out of the room as Aseles began to remove her shoes, exhaling when her socked feet felt the cool air of the room. She began to stand up, grabbing onto the head of the bed for support. She looked up toward the door to see Sora was back, a tall glass of cold water in his hand. He walked around, though he gave her a perplexed look when she took the water with a thanks.

“Aren’t you going to rest?” he asked.

“After a shower yeah,” Aseles scoffed, smiling slightly. “I don’t want to dirty my sheets either.”

“Oh, you have a point,” Sora nodded quickly. “Do you need help?”

Aseles stared at him with a brow raised, “....Undressing.....? Helping me take a shower?”

Sora blushed, shaking his head in embarrassment, “UH, never mind. Sorry, I didn’t mean it like that....”

Aseles giggled, shaking her head at him, “It’s alright, I know what you meant.”

“Oh...right...haha....ah...” Sora smiled nervously, rubbing the back of his neck. “SO, I suppose I should leave....”

“To help Donald and Goofy, yeah...”

“You sure you’ll be fine?” Sora opened a hand to her direction.

“Yes, I will,” Aseles nodded, chuckling.

“Alright....making sure. Then I guess I’ll see you in the morning,” Sora began to walk backwards, smiling to Aseles. Aseles waved to him as he turned and began to walk out the door. Aseles waited until he was gone to take a large gulp of her water, drinking all of it in one swing as she set the empty glass on the small desk beside. She leaned down very slowly to retrieve her pajamas from underneath the bed, groaning as she felt her spine contract together once she stood up.

Inside the bathroom, Aseles began to undress, letting her hair fall along her shoulders as she turned on the water, making sure it was warm. She stepped in, and once ten seconds in, Aseles

turned the water to cold, and groaned at the flourishing, firm water along her skin. She closed her eyes as she let the water rain on her face, hitting the top of her forehead and ride down her scalp, making her shudder. She began to cleanse herself, but her thoughts were roaming elsewhere.

*Unless you have known him....then I don't think the information in store holds anything that is of value to you...*

Could she...would she?

After cleaning herself thoroughly, Aseles stepped out of the shower, staring at the far wall as she gripped onto the counter to step out, pushing the curtains aside. She turned as she looked at the mirror, seeing and feeling her bangs wet against her forehead, the tips touching the top lids of her eyes. She opened her mouth to say something, but then shut up, concentrating on the droplets of the cold water running down her sore back and shoulders. Down the arms the liquid ran, coiling themselves into curving droplets at the base of her fingertips. They dropped to the floor, making soft popping sounds as Aseles waited for a few more minutes. If she slept now.....

Aseles began to hurriedly dress after drying herself as best as she could, feeling the pink throbbing of her muscles again. She placed on a new pair of underwear and bra, then proceeded to slip on her shorts and muscle shirt before folding her dirty clothes, knowing that Aerith would just wake up early to wash them for her. She turned off the light of the bathroom and hurried out, flinching with every step she took. She placed the clothes beside on the floor as she then curled up in her bed, pulling the blanket around her and curling onto the mattress. Her wet hair rested and sank into the pillow beneath her, and she turned to face the side toward the wall, looking out the small window to the dark sky outside.

“Sleep...” Aseles whispered to herself, and felt her eyes begin to heavy. Her eyes rolled to look at the wall, and began to let the dark clouds of her eyes take hold of her.

*Just promise me one thing...*

.....

*Promise me....you won't ever forget about me, about us, or this whole adventure. That's all I ask.*

.....

*Bye.*

.....

*I missed you so much...*

.....

*They want to find you Aseles.*

.....

*This is for your own wellbeing, Aseles-*

Aseles gasped, throwing her body upwards, and wincing from the tight constriction among her body. She looked ahead, finding the door to the bathroom at the center of the wall. She quickly looked to her right, seeing the room was much dimmed in light, with Donald, Goofy and Sora sleeping soundly. She shook her head vigorously as she looked to the wall again, her arms in front of her, laying on her stretched out legs.

What....was that?

With a shake of her head, Aseles looked up the wall behind her, looking at the clock to see it was almost seven in the morning...she didn't have much time left.

Aseles slid off of her bed, pushing the covers off as she kneeled to find her clothes were already washed and ironed. She smiled, though it dropped as Aseles quickly undressed, making sure the other three were not stirring in their sleep. Finally tucking in her shirt, Aseles folded her covers neatly and her pajamas, tossing them under the bed as she sneakily began to make her way toward the door of the room. Outside, Aseles began to tiptoe down the stairs, made her way into the kitchen, and unlocked the door. Outside, Aseles could feel the cool air of the dusk morning, gently closing the door. With a look around, Aseles made sure she was alone before heading into the maze of houses.

Aseles began to make her way around corners, though she stayed vigilant of anyone that would be awake right now. The place seemed so deserted, it was kind of creepy. She ended up at the bottom of the stairs, and she began to climb as steadily as she could, her thighs still squeezing from the training yesterday. If only Axel could give her a piggyback ride toward Ansem's Study.

Walking down the steps, Aseles began to pass the rebuilt walls of the Restoration Site, the green vines of life passing and brushing against her shoulder as she walked beside the heavy wall. She began to make her way up to the Postern, feeling triumphant to know she was still undetected, though that still left the question if anyone else was already inside. She hoped not. Suddenly, upon walking down the steps, Aseles backed up, regaining her balance as she looked at the three little sprites that had appeared in front of her, the same ones from the Bailey.

"Just where do you think you're going?" the brunette pointed to her. Her blue eyes flickered in question as Aseles looked toward the blond, then to the red-eyed one with grayish hair.

"Oh, you three again...." Aseles replied, looking at them strangely.

"Hi, I'm Rikku!" the one with the blond hair said happily, holding out her hand to Aseles.

"Don't, you're talking to the enemy!" the brunette whispered.

"The enemy?" Aseles blinked.

"But Yuna, maybe our leader is wrong," Rikku said, her hands behind her back.

"Well, she seems kinda....strange..." the one with the gothic replied, beginning to circle around Aseles.

Aseles's eyes traveled to her, "Strange? Well...you know what, yeah, fine, whatever. I really don't have time to argue with you three. So can you....let the enemy through?" she waved a hand dismissively to them.

"No can do!" the blond crossed her arms, shaking her head firmly.

"You have to pay to get across!" Yuna said, holding out her hand.

"Pay? Pay what?" Aseles incredulously asked.

"Tell her, Paine," Yuna smirked.

The gothic fairy cleared her throat, "Munny of course," she answered, giving a smirk.

"Munny? I don't have any Munny," Aseles answered, gesturing her arms open. The three then huddled together as Aseles groaned, throwing her arms up in the air...before dropping them immediately and flinching again. After a few moments, they circled around Aseles, her eyes quickly darting around the trio as they then stopped to float in front of her.

"We'll just take what you have!" Rikku said happily.

"Huh?"

"Come on, give it up!" Yuna said, smiling, "All of it."

"Unless, you tell us why you have to cross," Paine answered. Great, now these little fairies had to....UGH.

"Fine, you can come, but I'm not telling you what I'm going to do," Aseles narrowed her eyes, pointing to each individual fairy.

"Oh, afraid you'll get caught huh?" Rikku clapped, giggling. Aseles mumbled, rubbing her cheek as she quickly passed them, and began to walk down the steps and feeling the three sprites flying behind her. Aseles opened the door, and had no choice but to continue as the three fairies quickly swooped in before Aseles could close the door on them. The four began to trek into the maze of hallways, with Aseles in the lead as she tried to remember which path to take to get to the end.

"So, why are you here?" Yuna asked, her little wings fluttering behind her.

"I told you I won't tell you..." Aseles huffed.

"Is anyone following you?" Rikku asked, looking over Aseles's shoulder.

"No, and I'll like to keep it that way."

"Seems suspicious to me," Paine crossed her arms.

"Jeezes..." Aseles grumbled again as she continued. At the end, Aseles pressed her ear against the door, waiting for some movement inside. When there was none, Aseles opened the door and poked her head in, seeing the Study was completely empty and somewhat lit. Closing the door behind the sprites, Aseles hurriedly back to pass the Study and into the Computer Room, her feet quickly thudding against the glass floor. She approached the computer, pressing the "Enter" key before the whole screen flashed out to life, the text of words running up on it.

"Ooooooh," Rikku hummed, looking interestedly on the computer.

"Are you on a top secret mission?" Yuna

"Sure," Aseles shrugged.

"Who's there?" Tron's voice suddenly boomed.

"AHH! It talks!" Rikku hollered.

"SHH!!!" Aseles, Paine and Yuna shot around, Yuna quickly clasping her hand against Rikku's mouth. Rikku smiled nervously as Aseles stared at for a couple more seconds, then turned to look at the screen.

"Uh, it's me, Tron," Aseles replied gently.

"Oh, it's you Aseles. Good to hear you again," Tron said happily, "What can I assist you with?"

“Can you make all the files accessible to me? I just need to look for something...”

"Of course." The screen whirled as there were suddenly files upon files and files, making Aseles's mouth drop from the sight of it. However, Aseles began to hurriedly type in, and began to skim across the documents opening for her. She didn't have much time, and the others would be waking up soon.

Though, as Aseles continued to proceed, there didn't seem to be anything mentioned that Aseles could remember. Her eyes traveled hurriedly across the long paragraphs, reading what seemed to be statuses of the worlds, the Defense System, a few notes on Sora, Donald, and Goofy's progress, and the main foundations of what seemed to be of Radiant Garden...though.....

"Is something wrong?" Yuna asked. Aseles ignored her as she began to type in the words that came to mind, but was given an **“ERROR!”** tab. Aseles's hands curled into fists, but she focused once more, the documents now flying as Aseles began to look for her name among the records of the residents of the place. If Ansem the Wise lived here, then surely Aseles once had to as well....but.....

Aseles could feel her thighs buckle, unsure if it was from the training or not. She held onto the edge of the counter for support, and she dropped her head, shaking it to and fro. She felt the world heavy beneath her feet, somewhat expecting to be thrown upwards, crashing into the ceiling. It could not be.....Aseles was nowhere in the database.

Aseles dropped to her knees, gripping the edge of the keyboard as she rested her forehead against the wall of it. She sniffed gently, looking to the floor. She could feel the little fairies float around her.

“How is it possible...?” Aseles gritted her teeth.

"Is there something we can do?" Yuna asked, patting the top of Aseles's head.

The world spun slowly, thoughts crossing and colliding in Aseles's head. Was her life destined to be this way, to never remember anything?

“No.....there's nothing,” Aseles answered. How long had she been sitting there...seconds, minutes, an hour perhaps?

Aseles knew the fairies had retreated, and she was now alone, looking at the floor with her hands still clutching the keyboard. How could she simply stand up, and go outside like nothing was wrong? Again, Aseles was back to square one.

Then...Axel's words came into play.

Aseles could feel her face redden in anger, and then the voice of Xemnas echoed in her head. That man.....that man. That one Nobody....He knew more than what he was telling her....

“Aseles.” Aseles froze, now feeling the hard presence of a person near the doorway. Slowly, Aseles began to turn her eyes, her eyes widening to see it was Cloud standing, and his arms at his sides. His cold eyes scanned her face, but Aseles dropped her gaze, looking to the floor again. Cloud's feet began to move forward, and now stood beside her curled up position against the keyboard.

“You need to stand up, you're almost leaving,” Cloud replied.

“How could this be?” Aseles forced out, her eyes shooting up to the kneeling Cloud before her.

His arm rested on his bent knee, the other leg resting against the floor beneath him. Cloud's eyes hardened to her as Aseles shook her head, feeling the edges of her eyes swell uncomfortably with tears.

"What were you doing in here?" he asked.

"How is it possible...that when you found me you found nothing else but the clothes on my back, and a stupid keyblade in my hand?" Aseles fussed out, feeling her throat quake. "I'm a Nobody to this world. How, why can't I remember anything?"

"Because our destinies are chosen for us," Cloud merely replied, staring at her.

Aseles shot her eyes around, staring at him coldly, "No, my destiny was not chosen for *me*. I have the right to choose what *I* want, no one else."

"Then it's time you make a move," Cloud replied simply, standing up. Aseles looked up to him, and saw he was beginning to walk away. Though, he suddenly stopped, and turned around to look at Aseles again, "Someone must have your missing piece of the puzzle." Aseles blinked to him, and saw him leave out the door.

Now alone, Aseles began to stand up on her own, looking to her hands as she dropped her head in stance. Someone...had her missing piece? No doubt...it was Ansem the Wise.

Aseles turned to the computer, and began to extend her fingers out toward the keys, and began to punch the name in. The tab began to fill up, and in an instant, Aseles's eyes caught the face of Ansem the Wise...though....

Aseles tilted her head in confusion, seeing that the man had blond, medium-length hair. His eyes were a silky, deep, vibrant color of crimson...the same ones that man in the red robes had. Was that....really Ansem the Wise?

Aseles began to read down the comments noted down on his picture...but nothing seemed to be given to her. There was no record of his family, or not record of any relatives and friends. This man....was all alone, and he knew about Aseles? How did he have come to know her? By someone else?

"I'm going to find you....." Aseles whispered lowly, staring at the man looking over to the side with pointed eyes, "And you're going to tell me *everything*. I won't let you get away this time; that puzzle piece is as good as **mine**."



## The Cornerstone

FFW:

Aseles could feel her hands cold, numb at her fingers and toes. Her eyes glanced among the gloomy presence of the Underworld, uncertain of what they would find here. She stepped onto the fog as she looked about the dark cavern, her eyes avoiding everyone else's gaze as Sora, Donald and Goofy began to take a good look around.

"I say we split up to cover more ground, and see if we can run into any Nobodies," Sora advised, walking to the center as the rest of his group collected there. "I'll go with Donald. Goofy, watch out for Aseles. We'll meet back here if there isn't anything." Goofy nodded as Aseles watched Donald and Sora head toward the other side of the cave, toward the blue-lined doors.

"Let's go, Aseles," Goofy patted her shoulder as he began to lead her with him. Aseles followed beside him as the two slipped within the crack of the green-lined rock doors. Inside, Aseles became alert as she and Goofy began to walk down the rock ramp at the left side, diving under the sea of fog above their heads. They began to walk into the rock maze; though Aseles made sure to remember the way they came as she looked around the dim area, the blue cracking of bright fire among the walls.

"Shouldn't we be worried that-...Oh wait...you said you guys took care of Hades, right?" Aseles replied, looking to Goofy who had his shield out, ready in hand.

"Uh huh," Goofy nodded. "See any Nobodies?"

"No, not any," Aseles replied, keyblade resting on her shoulder. Her ponytail waved to and fro, but her eyes found nothing out of the ordinary among the area. Though, she stopped momentarily, and looked to Goofy with sulked eyes,

"Is there any difference even happening? I mean, in numbers of the Heartless and Nobodies?"

"Hmm...I'm not quite sure..." Goofy held his chin, giving a small shake, "But that doesn't mean we have to stop trying."

"But..." Aseles dropped her guard, her arms limp at her sides.

"Is something wrong?" Goofy asked.

"It's just....nothing seems to be changing.....things are only getting worse..." Aseles grumbled.

"Everything will get better..." Goofy placed a hand on her shoulder, causing her to pick up her head, "You'll see. The Organization will be stopped, and we'll always win against the Heartless. You just have to trust in your friends."

"I.....suppose so..." Aseles nodded slowly.

Goofy and Aseles now walked in silence, finally making it to the end of the tricky maze. They stood at the center of the rock platform where Meg was once encased in. Aseles took a good look around with Goofy as one took each opposite side, the flaming lanterns surrounding the area and lighting it delicately.

"So the Heartless attacking the Nobodies....Never thought that would happen," Aseles began to Goofy.

"Hmm...doesn't seem there are any Nobodies around here. I think we should head back with Donald and Sora."

"Alright..." Aseles nodded, placing her keyblade over her shoulder again as she followed behind Goofy out of the maze.

With a few detours, the two were able to remember their way back, and climbed up the rock ramp they descended down earlier from. The doors parted open as the two stepped out, looking ahead to see Sora and Donald were already waiting at the center of the cave. Their eyes looked over with Sora waving with a stern expression on his face. Aseles looked to him, but shook the thought out as she followed behind the leading Goofy.

"So, no Nobodies?" Donald asked as the two were now in front of them.

Goofy and Aseles shook their heads, "Not a single one."

"Did you?" Goofy asked.

"Nah, looks like we're done here," Sora said, his hands behind his head.

"I don't believe so." Aseles swiftly shot her head around, looking among the rock walls and ceiling. That voice.....it sounded like....Saix. Immediately Sora waved his keyblade out, Donald, Goofy and Aseles pressed back to back.

"Show yourself!" Sora called out.

"With pleasure." Aseles's eyes widened as she swiftly stumbled back, seeing Saix had appeared in between the four. Donald quaked as he hit the floor, with Goofy shuffling with shield out in front of him. Sora growled as he gripped onto his keyblade tightly, his eyes glowered to Saix who faced him.

"What do you want?" Sora asked fiercely.

"I am here to offer you proposition," Saix pulled back his hood, letting the blue layer of hair fall down his shoulders.

"Whatever it is, we're not interested!" Sora spat back.

"An exchange.....Axel, for Kairi," Saix's golden eyes glittered. Aseles's mouth turned to a firm line, her eyes racing to Saix, then to Sora. Sora's face instantly relaxed with his arms firm as they flexed from the lessening grip of his keyblade. His nostrils flared, and he suddenly dropped his guard.

"Axel, for Kairi?" Sora asked, his mouth dropping slightly.

Saix nodded once, "We will be sure that he receives the maximum punishment."

"No," Aseles suddenly took a step forward, shaking her head.

"Aseles!" Donald whispered in disbelief, his eyes widening to look at her. Saix slowly turned his attention back, looking to Aseles as Sora's eyes did the same, widening at Aseles.

"No deal," Aseles threw her free hand forward; a firm shake of her head spoke her statement again.

"What are you saying?" Sora demanded quickly, his face somewhat reddening.

Aseles glared to Saix, "Even if we give you Axel, you won't give up Kairi to us."

"Are you sure?" Saix questioned his voice husky and dark. Aseles eyes widened by a fraction, her throat lurching as she gulped. Could Saix really be telling the truth?

"Please, take me to Kairi," Sora looked to Saix, taking a step to him.

Saix looked to him, his eyes scanning Sora's face, "...Is she that important to you?"

"Yes...more than anything..." Sora breathed out, his keyblade limp in his hand. Aseles bit her tongue, feeling her body tremble.

"Show me how...important," Saix commented. Sora stared at Saix, but his gaze began to drop. Suddenly, Sora's grip loosened completely, his keyblade clattering to the rock floor.

"Sora!" Goofy warned, though Sora was now sulking down to his knees on the ground. His hands spread out in front of him, his fingers lying flat on the ground. He was kneeling in front of Saix...for Kairi.

Sora's bangs hung over his face, his lips opening, "Please.....take me to her."

"Without Axel...the answer is no," Saix replied firmly.

"Please.." Sora's gritted his teeth, "Take me to Kairi..."

"Hand Axel over to me," Saix replied more firmly.

Sora quickly stood up, his hands in fists as he stared up at Saix, "If we give you Axel, you need to give us Kairi at that moment."

Saix stared expressionless to Sora, but opened his mouth, "Of course." Saix took a step back, and was engulfed in a clash of black flames. The next second, Saix was gone, leaving nothing of his presence behind.

Sora gritted his teeth as he shot his eyes to the side, but they swiftly picked up toward Aseles. Aseles immediately backed a couple of steps away to see Sora was advancing to her, "What was that about?!"

"Sora, you can't just believe whatever they tell you! Stop being so gullible about everything!" Aseles instantly shot out. Her eyes widened as she saw Sora's face flash angry.

"I had the chance to get Kairi back, and you act as if it doesn't matter a thing!" Sora shouted, his eyes narrowed to Aseles as he took another step forward.

"Sora, calm down!" Donald yelled his wand at ready.

"How can I calm down?! How can I when they have Kairi and they can do whatever they want with her?" Sora argued back.

Goofy grew furious, "You don't have to be a knucklehead about it!"

"What if I am!?" Sora yelled.

"Sora," Aseles swiftly cut him off. His eyes shot to her, and she stared at him, shuddering in place, "...Saix wouldn't have given up Kairi to you....they just...want Axel...."

"Why do you defend him so much?" Sora glowered, his voice turning to hot, scorching lava.

“I don’t-“ Aseles began.

“What is it? What is your connection to Axel?” Sora took another step forward, and was now leaning over Aseles’s face, “What else...are you hiding?”

“Nothing, I’m not hiding anything!” Aseles shook her head anxiously.

“You lied to us before!” Donald suddenly spat out to her, pointing his wand to her.

“No, you don’t understand!” Aseles shook her head more frantically, “There is nothing going on between Axel and me! I would never betray you guys! You’re my friends!”

“Are you waiting for the right moment to strike? Go ahead, do it!” Sora suddenly threw his arms forward. Aseles quickly backed away, seeing Donald was suddenly on the other side of her, his wand pointing at her face. Aseles’s felt her face begin to swell, the edges of her eyes struggling with the tears. She continued to shake her head, wiping off the bottom of her nose as Sora, Donald and Goofy blinked to her sudden reaction.

“Y-You’re my family! H-How could you think....I would e-ever do something.....” she slapped her hands against her face, feeling her legs buckle beneath her.

“Aseles...” Goofy answered.

“I have nothing! I have nothing to call a family....and you guys.....” Aseles sniffed, “I don’t understand....I don’t understand why you don’t trust me, why you don’t trust Axel. He only screwed up once....and.....” The air thickened as Aseles felt her body lose momentum, and she was now on the floor, resting on her rear with her knees bent in front of her.

After a few long moments, Aseles felt her shoulders held. She slowly looked up, feeling Sora’s front bangs caress her forehead. She looked into his shining eyes, a small frown on his lips.

“...I’m sorry....” he whispered, brushing off the ends of Aseles’s tears.

“Why don’t you just give him a chance.....?” Aseles whispered back hoarsely. Sora’s face turned rigid, the frown expanding as he looked back to see Donald and Goofy standing behind him, their eyes traveling among his face. Sora turned to look back at Aseles, and his began to nod slightly.

“....Alright....I’ll give him a chance.....” Sora replied lowly.

Aseles’s face perked up, her hands traveling up to remove her tears from her lashes, “....What?”

“They might be lying to us...and we can’t take any chances...” Sora nodded slowly, “We need all the help we can get to bring down Organization XIII....”

“Sorry we yelled at you,” Donald came up next, lending a hand out to Aseles. She looked to it, and to Sora’s extending fingers. She took them cautiously, but stood herself up as Goofy came around to dust her back off of the fog.

“Let’s....head out....” Sora replied.

“It’s best to stop by Disney Castle, and check on everyone there,” Donald informed.

“Alright....let’s get going...” Sora replied, beginning to lead the way.

“I gotcha,” Goofy smiled slightly to Aseles who nodded to him, feeling his arm wrap around her shoulders as he began to walk with her behind Donald and Sora.

LATER:

Aseles felt her face crackling, her skin peeling off and she felt the stings among her muscles. She sniffed gently, wiping and rubbing off the dry tears from her cheeks. She wasn't the one to cry...but to be battled with the past all the time....Aseles wasn't sure if she would be able to handle something else like that. They were practically ready to abandon her in Olympus, with no reason but a hunch to follow on.

Was she really that untrustworthy?

With all the events, she could see why they would *still* suspect her, but the fact that Sora didn't trust Axel played a major part of it all, and Donald was backing him up on it. It didn't seem Goofy had a say in it, but Aseles was glad he somewhat comforted her after the whole incident. Not once did Sora or Donald dare to approach her when she cried, with Goofy nearly patting and rubbing her back reassuringly, repeating over and over again that everything would turn out better.

The matter of the fact was...Aseles was going nowhere with her questions. She had to find Ansem the Wise, but she wasn't sure how to even locate him in the first place. He had her missing piece, and she needed it tremendously. Where did she really belong? What....what if she really did belong to Organization XIII? What would she do then?

"We're here, strap yourselves in," Sora replied from the center. Aseles fixed herself properly in her seat, Goofy at her left, followed by Sora and then Donald at the end. Sora began to steer the ship gently downward, then began to pull it back as the gummi ship entered the darkened walls of metal around them. There was the loud, low hum of the Hanger as the gummi ship was brought into light again. Aseles squint her eyes, feeling the ship jerk back, then forward, and then settled itself down. The opening door at the bottom jerked outward as the group began to unbuckle themselves, walking their way down with Aseles last as she moved over to the stairs at the far side, walking up the steps behind Sora, Donald and Goofy. However, the trio stopped as she looked to them, seeing Donald was fiddling with some controls beside a computer screen against the wall. He seemed bothered by something of what he was looking at.

"Is it damaged?" Sora questioned.

"I think so....but we have parts," Donald quickly added.

"Then I say we fix it before we go check on Her Majesty," Goofy announced.

"Aseles."

Aseles turned her attention to Sora, "Yes?"

"Do you mind keeping her company while we fix this?"

"...Would she be in the Library?" Aseles looked to Goofy. He nodded with a smile. "Alright then..." Aseles began to make her way up the stairs at the far, left side, the twinkling lights on the walls glittering at her and she passed by them.

She reached the top steps as she then walked forward, opening the vined doors to make her way into the Courtyard garden of the castle. Walking along the trail, Aseles found herself at the entrance of the hallway and opened the doors, glad that no Heartless of any sort had infiltrated into the grounds. She felt the soft rug against her feet as she walked up, and found herself at the top balcony of the Courtyard. Her eyes looked ahead, seeing the doors leading into the Library...however.....

Aseles came upon the center place of the hallway, looking to the right slowly to see the door leading to the Throne Room was left slightly ajar. Aseles looked among the area, finding it deserted as she began to slink her way toward the door very cautiously. She stood in front of the door, pushing it slightly ajar with a finger as she backed up a step, and knelt as she peeked into the vertical slit of the room. King Mickey was speaking with someone....and then-

Aseles's eyes widened, her ears picking up on the conversation Mickey was having with the man at the side, out of Aseles's view.

"We must not tell her, Your Majesty," the man spoke in a deep voice. That deep voice.....

"But why not?" Mickey seemed to plead.

"She must not know her past, only what comes to her. She mustn't think of her past, not after what happened..." the man spoke.

"She'll understand, she'll understand you well, Ansem." It was him.

"No, she'll never forgive me of what I did to her...."

Aseles turned red in the face as she immediately bashed her way in, the door slamming against the wall. Her eyes shot ahead, looking at the man in the red robes, his bright eyes targeting Aseles. Mickey's face doubled back as he stood firm in his stance, his arms open at his sides in shock.

"Aseles!" Mickey exclaimed.

Aseles growled, her eyes livid toward Ansem, "You won't get away this time! You will tell me everything!" Aseles swung her arm across, her keyblade flashing out as the dark wisps began to engulf her heart.

"Aseles! Let us explain!" Mickey defended quickly.

"How do you know me?" Aseles pointed her keyblade at Ansem.

"I can assure you, now is not the time to talk," Ansem suddenly answered, calm and cool.

"What?" Aseles scoffed out, "No, I need to know now! No more secrets from me!"

"If you suggest to fight, then so be it!" Ansem suddenly said, facing her.

Aseles was taken aback, but she charged, the raw emotion of rage alive and pumping in her veins. Aseles swung her keyblade's tip in his direction, a bolt of thunder cascading sharply across the air and hitting against the marble floor as Ansem dodged. Aseles bolted forward in full speed as she came into striking distance, swinging her keyblade at the still Ansem. Suddenly, Mickey came into the fight, his keyblade shining as he blocked and held Aseles's keyblade against his own. The sparks flew ravenously.

"Aseles stop this at once!" Mickey ordered, both keyblades shaking on contact.

"But he knows why!! He knows why everything has gone wrong for me! He knows about my life that I don't!" Aseles yelled, glaring at Mickey.

Mickey could only stare back, "I know Aseles, but now's not the time to know about it. I'm sorry." Aseles's eyes widened, and she jumped back. She darted her eyes around...and found that Ansem....was gone. No, he couldn't be gone! No! NO!

Aseles whirled around, her keyblade shaking in hand as she took a few steps forward, back, and around. He was indeed gone while Mickey had fended her off. That was only a few seconds, and how could-

"Aseles, nobody must know about this," Mickey interrupted. Aseles threw her face to him, dubious of what he had just said.

"Why? So nobody can know why I'm this way? So nobody can feel my pain?! Am I just like a Nobody.....to you, and that Ansem person.....?" Aseles demanded angrily, her keyblade flying out of her hand as she tossed it away from her.

Mickey's mouth turned to a firm line, his eyes looking discouraged to the clattering then still keyblade, then back to her, "No, it's not that. It's complicated. You can't talk to Ansem right now...."

"You got in my way," Aseles glowered to him. "My one chance...and *you* ruined it."

"At the moment, he's going through something, and he knows you are too. I can't tell you much right now, but you'll learn when you're ready to take down Organization XIII, with Sora, Donald and Goofy by your side. You can't face the truth without them, it'll be too difficult to handle," Mickey finished, starting to walk away, heading to the door Aseles had burst through.

Aseles could only stare at where Ansem once stood, forcing herself to accept the fact that he wasn't coming back to confront her. Only he had the answers to her motile questions.

"Minnie is waiting at the Library. Come out when you're ready," Mickey called out. Aseles flinched in her spot, but she turned around to watch him walk out into the hallway, and closed the door behind him.

Aseles trembled in her spot, and she cried out angrily once, clamping her hands to her face. She mumbled incoherently to herself, feeling the pits of her stomach flipping and twisting uncomfortably. What was she to do now....she was close.....she was *so* close to those answers.....

Aseles stuffed her hands in her pockets, and proceeded to make her way forward-

*"Donald Duck!"*

*"The name's Goofy!"*

*"I'm Sora!"*

Aseles swiftly shot around, her eyes lingering among the air, "...Hello?" The voices continued to echo, and Aseles instantly recognized them as her friends' voices...though Sora's seemed....much lighter in tone. How....

"Hello?" Aseles began to venture back, heading toward the moved throne. She appeared at the top of the staircase, looking down the dimmed stairs to see the light of the Cornerstone glowing immensely. Aseles looked back momentarily before she began to venture down the path; her footsteps thudding as she finally reached the bottom floor. The Cornerstone stood boldly on its curving stand, shining incredibly with the galaxies swirling within it.

Aseles began to near it as she walked cautiously, her feet sliding across the marble floor slowly. She was now standing in front of him, her eyes glazing among the bouncing orbs inside. Her eyes followed the moments closely, and for a moment she was looking at her reflection among the curving glass. Aseles reached her hand forward, seeing her hair waving within the reflection...but there was no breeze within the room.....

A huge rumble suddenly commenced as Aseles staggering on her balance, her hands clamping against the heavy glass in front of her. Her eyes widened as the Cornerstone began to blind her vision, and she suddenly began to feel light, a feather in the breeze.

What was happening?

*Aseles was freefalling; down....down she went toward the center of a large area, filled with upside-down waterfalls. The mist collected on her face, and she suddenly found herself tossed across the air, her feet unable to touch the floor as she struggled to get herself down...but she was like a soul without a body, her eyes traveling hurriedly across the place. At the far end, she could see a large castle....and then she was hovering over an area, her eyes launching below her with her hair wavering at the sides of her temples and ears. She squinted her eyes, and they widened to see a silver-haired boy facing Beast.*

*"No vessel, no help from the Heartless...So tell me, how'd you get here?" the boy asked, eyeing Beast with narrow eyes.*

*"I simply believed. Nothing more to it. When our world fell into darkness, Belle was taken from me. I vowed I would find her again no matter what the cost. I believed I would find her. So here I am. She must be here. **I will have her back!**" Beast roared with anger.*

*"Take her if you can!" the boy yelled back, grinning. Aseles watched as Beast roared with a leap. Aseles's eyes widened as the boy suddenly back flipped, and waved his arm in front of him, a forming blade slicing against the front of Beast's chest. Beast was thrown back, falling to the side as the boy smirked at his action, flicking his blade clean.*

*"Stop!"*

*Aseles watched in bewilderment, seeing Sora, a younger Sora running up the cracked steps, behind him Donald and Goofy.*

*"So, you finally made it. About time. I've been waiting for you," the silver-haired boy began, looking at Sora, and only Sora. "We've always been rivals, haven't we? You've always pushed me as I've always pushed you..."*

*"Riku," Sora said, but that was all he could say at this point. Aseles's mouth widened, her hands clamping to her mouth as she merely floated there, a ghost in the wind. How was she able to look at this? Was this even real?*

*"But it all ends here. There can't be two keyblade masters," Riku suddenly replied.*

*"What are you talking about?" Sora asked, eyeing Riku with suspicion.*

*"Let the keyblade choose...its true master." Riku held out his hand high to the air; grin wide as he faced Sora. This wasn't Riku, not the Riku Sora had mentioned.*

*Sora keyblade suddenly blinked up in his hand, and it shook terribly. Sora gripped it tighter, then with two hands. It disappeared from sight into small orbs of light. Donald and Goofy jumped with fright and shock. The keyblade suddenly appeared in Riku's hand.*

*His eyes grew with curiosity, and pleasure, "Maleficent was right. You don't have what it takes to save Kairi," Riku pointed at Sora with a finger. Emptiness grew, swelled inside Aseles like never before. "It's up to me. Only the keyblade master can open the secret door and change the world," Riku finished, holding his new keyblade up to the sky.*



*"But that's impossible. How did this happen? I'm the one who fought here with the keyblade!" Sora argued with his gloved hands into fists. His eyes stared into Riku's icy pools.*

*"You were just the delivery boy," Riku continued, "Sorry, your part's over now. Here, go play hero with this." Riku suddenly threw a wooden sword at Sora's feet. Sora could only back away from it, his face confused, his eyes still with hope that this was all wrong, that maybe....*

*He fell on his knees, eyeing the wooden thing with depression. Riku started to walk away, proud and satisfied of what had happened. Donald and Goofy stepped forward.*

*"Goofy. Let's go," Donald immediately said, "We have to remember our mission." They were going to abandon Sora.....alone.*

*"Oh! Well, I know the king told us to follow the key and all...But..." Goofy looked down at Sora, his eyes confused of which one to follow. Donald started to walk away, Goofy following behind him with doubt of his decision.*

*Donald stopped, turning his head to Sora, "Sora, sorry." Donald quickly turned around. What the heck was this place? A dream? A nightmare?*

*The light blinded Aseles once more; the wind rushing past her as Aseles ducked her face in, whimpering until finally she could open her eyes. She found herself floating in a huge red rugged room now, everything mute, in the Grand Hall of the castle of Hollow Bastion it seemed. The fountain was lively with falling water and mist, though at the center of the room was a whole blotch of Darkness, fidgeting over a red-haired girl. She was in trouble!*

*The Heartless were suddenly thrown to the ground to ashes the next second, and Aseles instantly recognized it being Kairi, though a younger version of herself. In her arms, hugging her back was Sora.*

*"Thank you, Kairi," Sora said, his arms embraced around her-*

Aseles fell to the ground, wincing as she clutched her lower back. Her head spun wildly as she tried to gather her vision back, feeling the cold room take hold of her essence. She blinked rapidly, and found herself facing the Cornerstone yet again. What....what just happened?

"Aseles!" Aseles turned her head about, seeing Sora was rushing to her, his eyes wide at her fallen posture, "Are you alright?" Aseles shook her head, her mouth opening to say something, but nothing came out.

What did Aseles just see?

"Is everything alright?" Mickey suddenly barged in. Aseles swiftly began to stand, grabbing onto her stomach tightly with clutching fingers, feeling her heart racing at maximum. Sora hurried to stand over her, and was inspecting her for any wounds.

"Everything's fine," Sora replied out to him.

"Aseles, what were you doing in here?"

"I-I...I didn't-but," Aseles shook her head, gulping in the air.

"What's wrong.....did you see something?" Sora questioned, his eyes narrowing to her.

"I'm fine....it's just....I never- I was caught off guard...."

"Come on, we better go check everyone else," Sora suggested. Aseles nodded slowly, feeling Sora lead her forward. The two walked past Mickey, though the little mouse glanced his eyes to Aseles, her eyes checking on him at their corners. She abruptly looked away, instead looking down the steps she was climbing, unsure of what she had just seen moments before.

# Jafar's Return

## Chapter Summary

So sorry for this late chapter, but I had to go in and modify a ton of things. Nevertheless, here is the fresh chapter, enjoy (:

### NEXT MORNING:

Aseles yawned, rubbing her eyes from sleepiness. She was roaming down the hall, certainly more relieved than anyone else that there was absolutely no sign of Organization XIII infiltrating the guard of the castle. The sky was shining now, penetrating the open archways of the balcony she was walking on once she made a turn from the dim, stone hallway.

With patrolling the night before, Aseles felt somewhat exhausted that she only got about five hours of sleep, feeling that it was not enough, clearly. She rubbed her eyes again, her feet somewhat dragging along the rugged, curving floor toward the entrance of the Library at the end. Aseles began to head to it, but then she stopped as she looked to the right ahead, catching the lavender doors at the center of the hall.

Standing before it, Aseles looked among the hallway, her eyes shifting as she stayed completely silent, hoping to catch a pair of footsteps in earshot...but she found none, nothing to stop her nosiness. Aseles looked to the doors again, her eyes jerking along the surface of it.

Ever since the day before, Aseles had avoided all contact with the room, and with Mickey himself. She guessed he suspected something, but wasn't planning on hearing what he had to say. The fact remained that he hid something from her, she could not see past that to openly interact with him. She did not understand why he was in the first place, but if he was going to keep secrets, so was she.

"Hold it." Aseles froze, and she whirled around, looking toward the direction of the Library to see Mickey was in view, walking down the hallway with his eyes intent on Aseles. Aseles composed herself quickly as she turned to look at him, her profile facing the doors and her eyes looking down at the mouse.

"Uh.....wrong room," Aseles replied, looking at Mickey nonchalantly.

"You perfectly know well what I want to talk to you about," Mickey crossed his arms.

"No, I have no idea."

"Are we really going to do this?"

"I don't see why I need to tell you, if no one needs to know about it," Aseles stared back at him just the same, feeling her stomach twisting uncomfortably.

Mickey's eyes narrowed, "...You're really going to do this."

Yes, she was. Despite being in his castle, Aseles saw no reason to explain anything to him anymore. Ansem was her key to revealing everything, and for whatever reason he was giving not

to tell her....it was not good enough for her. Selfish as he might see it, Aseles was somewhat tired of helping everyone else, knowing it wasn't giving her anything to go on to find out what happened to her memories. If Mickey wouldn't help Aseles....who would, considering Sora, Donald and Goofy served only him?

"I need to wake up the others...." Aseles replied as she felt the snap within Mickey.

"...You'll be departing soon," Mickey replied calmly, seeming to accept Aseles' turn of tone.

"Your Majesty!" Aseles turned, looking to see Sora was approaching, with Donald and Goofy trying to wake up as they slouched behind him. Sora, energetic and ready, hurried over as Aseles took a step aside for him, seeing him look down to Mickey eagerly.

"Sora, do you need something?" Mickey asked warmly, eyebrow raised.

"We're...heading out early today, but I wanted to ask you something," Sora replied, his face shining.

"Alright, let's go talk in the Library," Mickey replied. Sora nodded quickly as he followed behind Mickey, though he turned to look at Aseles, "I'll be right back."

"We'll wait in the Courtyard," Aseles replied to him. Sora smiled to her as he turned around, following Mickey inside the Library at the end. Aseles waited for a moment, then began to make her way toward where Goofy and Donald waited, Goofy yawning as Donald was finally starting to come to.

"Hey, you ready to go Aseles?" Donald asked.

As Aseles looked to him, she cleared her throat, "Yeah," she lied. "What did Sora want to talk to Mickey about?"

"Not sure, he wouldn't say," Goofy scratched his head. The trio waited for some time, but finally Sora emerged out with Mickey calling out to him to have a safe journey...though Sora's expression spoke something entirely different.

Aseles, Donald and Goofy watched him carefully as Sora stopped briefly before them, and nodded, "It's time to go."

FFW:

It didn't take long to notice that Sora was too quiet to be himself, and Aseles kept turning to look over at him every once in a while to see how he was holding up, but mostly her attention was to Donald who was teaching her on how to maneuver the gummi ship with Goofy indicating what controls did what. It was an attentive two hour lesson, but Aseles nodded and was confident enough to take the wheel after some encouragement from Goofy.

It didn't seem too difficult, seeing that she would just occasionally observe from afar, though it was certainly different operating it. Nevertheless, Aseles was now steering the wheel, her eyes vigilant up ahead in the night sky. The wheel's rim fit perfectly in her gripping palms as Aseles exhaled deeply, with the cockpit completely silent in her operation. The three had fallen to a deep slumber, and Aseles questioned whether they fell asleep soundly in the castle or not.

Over the course of the drive, Aseles's mind began to wander back and forth from concentrating to driving, and back to the encounter with Ansem in Disney Castle. Aseles sighed to herself, feeling her face burn from the irritation of it all. What could Mickey possibly be hiding from her? She needed to find out....she needed to know.

The answer was with that mouse, and next best thing to go to for the information. Despite unable to talk to him, Aseles was now sure that Ansem knew her; there was no doubt in her mind about that. The question remaining was how did he have come to know her?

IN AGRABAH:

"Why is it so empty?" Donald asked, looking around deserted Bazaar. The sun hit the sand hotly, creating thick waves among the air and among the mud-built and stone buildings.

"The place *is* in the middle of the desert," Sora shrugged. Donald gave him a deadpanned look, but Sora continued forth, his bright blue eyes attentive to the ceilings of the buildings. In the shade, the group stopped as Aseles rubbed her shoulder, unsure where everyone could possibly be. With no other direction but the Palace Doors to go to, Sora began to lead the way, making sure to walk in the shades of the buildings as Donald, Goofy and Aseles stuck relatively close behind him. He didn't seem too much out of it, but Aseles knew well that something was still poking Sora at the back of his head.

Reaching the doors, Sora knocked loudly with his fist, and he took a step back to look at the guard that had opened the door, "Is Aladdin here?"

"Not at the moment. Who are you four?" the guard asked bitterly.

"We're friends of -" Sora began, but was instantly cut off by a pair of running footsteps from the side. The four shot their heads back to see Aladdin with Abu clinging onto the back of his head.

"Guys!" Aladdin panted as he made his way over to them, his clutching hands holding onto the fabric on his knees.

"Jeez, why are you in a hurry?" Sora blinked. "Wait, is it a Nobody?"

"A Nobody?" Aladdin raised a brow, still trying to catch his breath. He shook off his curiosity as he finally leveled his breathing, but his eyes narrowed, "No, I'm looking for the peddler. The one from before."

"The peddler?" Goofy asked.

"I heard the peddler freed Jafar," Aladdin said.

"What?!" the four jolted on the spot, their eyes exchanging with each other.

"Do you know where he is?" Donald asked.

"No, but I was going to go to his store right now, c'mon!" Aladdin beckoned hurriedly as he began to take a run again, Sora looking to his crew before signaling them to follow as well. Running along the shadowed, humid alleyways of the buildings and Bazaar, the gang finally arrived at the front of the Peddler's Shop. Aladdin wasted no time rushing inside, tossing the blanket entrance aside. When Aseles peeked in, her mouth dropped to see the store was enriched with gold shelves and gold cabinets. Abu made a fist, hitting the air: the peddler was not inside.

"He must be at the Cave of Wonders!" Aladdin informed.

"Ow!" Aseles flinched as she clamped her hand against the back of her hair, rubbing the throbbing skin. She quickly whirled around, looking down to see the fallen object that had crashed into her. It was a red, feathered bird, with huge blue feathers on his tail with some on the base of his wings. He had a large round orange beak, and his eyes shot up to look at Aseles as he

grumbled to stand up on his talons.

“Why don’t you watch where you’re going?” the bird instantly curled one wing as a fist, shaking it to Aseles.

“Excuse me?” Aseles narrowed her eyes, and pointed in his direction, “You were the one flying!”

“Aseles, you alright?” Sora blinked, coming out of the shop to stand beside Aseles. Though, once his eyes shot down to the bird, he took a more bold and aggressive stance, “What are you doing here, Iago?”

“Sora! Oh! Aladdin, friends!” the bird named Iago quickly rose up, flying.

“You!” Donald suddenly lunged himself forward as Goofy and Sora quickly caught him midflight, pulling Donald back.

“Donald!” Goofy interjected.

“I’m going to freeze his tail off!” Donald shouted, instantly taking out his wand and trying to swing it over Sora’s shoulder.

“What do you want, Iago? We don’t have time for your schemes,” Aladdin gritted his teeth, “Be grateful we’re not planning on getting revenge for last time.”

“Revenge?” Aseles raised a brow.

Iago quickly shook his head, “I’m totally a new bird! You gotta believe me!”

“What do you want?? I’m tempted on letting Donald go,” Sora replied firmly, Donald finally held tightly in Goofy’s grasp.

“I came looking for you to tell you about Jafar!” Iago replied, seeming to tremble as he flapped in the air, “Let me help you! I know where he is!”

“And why should we trust you?” Aladdin crossed his arms on his chest, Abu eying the bird angrily.

“I know I’ve made mistakes, but I want to change, you gotta believe me...” Iago sighed, almost seeming tired.

“I don’t know...” Sora rubbed his chin.

“Maybe you should...give him a chance,” Aseles blinked, looking to Iago, then to Sora and Aladdin.

“Iago worked with Jafar before, and almost sent us to our deaths in lava,” Aladdin added, staring almost deadpanned at her.

“Oh...” Aseles frowned. “But....you have to give people chances. Even birds.”

“Aseles, it’s easier said than done,” Sora looked over to her, crossing his arms firmly.

“Just like you guys gave me a chance, you should give Iago one. It’s only fair,” Aseles stood her ground. Sora opened his mouth, but he shut it closed, and sighed as he rubbed his forehead. Aseles looked to Iago, “What information do you have on Jafar that might help us?”

Iago’s eyes widened a bit, and he stuttered on his sentence, “I heard the peddler took the lamp

from the Cave of Wonders.”

“It’s a start,” Aseles commented.

Aladdin suddenly jabbed his finger to Iago’s chest, the bird flying back hurriedly to avoid being poked gravely, “Are you sure? We’re going to hold you onto that.”

“I can help?” Iago questioned incredulously.

“We’re going to keep a heavy eye on you,” Aladdin threatened again. “We need Carpet to get there.”

“Are you sure it’s a good idea to trust him?” Donald quickly interjected, ruffling down the feathers Goofy accidentally pushed up.

“We have no other leads,” Sora sighed, dejected on the idea, “We’re going to have to trust him on this one.”

“Ugh, fine,” Donald crossed his arms, huffing once.

Sora looked up to Aseles, taking a step forward in her direction before whispering, “I hope you’re right.” Aseles blinked, but nodded to him once as Sora stared at her for a couple of more seconds, then turned to walk beside Aladdin as the duo began to lead the way.

“That was awfully nice of you,” Goofy smiled, patting Aseles’s shoulder.

“Too nice if you ask me,” Donald grumbled, walking past the two. Aseles looked after him, frowning slightly as Goofy gave her a reassuring squeeze on the shoulder.

“Mind if I stick with you two?” Iago suddenly came from beside.

“Sure,” Aseles shrugged, Goofy leading her forward behind the group and through the abandoned shops in the Bazaar.

#### MOMENTS LATER:

The air rushed along Aseles’s face, her hands grabbing on the edges of Carpet as it zoomed through the air, the others quiet and rigid while Iago was sitting back against Aseles’s lap. Needless to say, everyone except her and Goofy kept aiming glances at Iago once in a while, and Aseles could only wonder how much resentment they had for this bird. She knew that he worked for Jafar, though she had no idea who it was, but it must’ve been something for the group to not fully accept someone. Aseles would know.

"Hey, look!" Donald pointed to a figure below, running the opposite direction. It was the peddler, holding onto his turban tightly from preventing it from falling off his small head.

"Carpet!" Aladdin dived down as Carpet followed to his order, rushing toward the ground as the group held tightly. Carpet stopped as Aladdin and Sora immediately got off, halting the peddler from advancing further.

"Don't bother going anywhere; we need to ask you a few questions!" Aladdin started as the peddler shifted in place, obviously having nowhere else to run.

"I don't know anything!" the peddler yelled.

"Don't lie! Iago said you went to get that stupid lamp!" Aladdin argued, Iago shrouding his face

with his wings as he kept himself within Aseles's lap. The peddler suddenly grew angry.

"That good for nothing bird!" the peddler suddenly cursed out in a different language, Iago giving a nervous smile to Aladdin. Aladdin shifted his eyes from Iago to the peddler.

"Are you lying to us?" Aladdin asked as the peddler suddenly took off, running toward the direction of Agrabah. Iago flapped himself up from Aseles's lap, Aseles keeping her eyes on the bird.

"I thought you said the peddler had the lamp," Sora added.

"He *did*!" Iago answered.

"Did? What do you mean 'did'?! " Sora asked, standing by Aladdin as Donald and Goofy shifted at the sides of Aseles.

"I knew we shouldn't trust him!" Donald said, crossing his arms.

"Where's the lamp now?" Aladdin asked, Abu screeching angry comments at Iago.

"I don't know!" Iago replied.

"Where is he?" Goofy asked. Iago shrugged, but the mounting stares were unceasing on him as the bird finally sighed heavily, "Fine! He's in the Ruins."

"The Ruins?" Sora asked.

"It's somewhere away from here, but I'm sure we can make it in time before anybody else finds it," Aladdin nodded as Carpet grew a rug smile, "Let's hurry, guys." He and Sora quickly mounted back on Carpet as Iago flew over to sit beside Aseles, but once Carpet took off, Aseles grabbed onto him and placed him in her crossed lap again.

The sun was immensely hot the farther they went from the city, and it was a tense silence until they finally reached what seemed to be the crevice of a waterfall of sand. Carpet dived down, Aseles holding tightly onto Goofy's shoulder as the air blew back her hair. Carpet hovered near the middle of the sand waterfall behind them, and in front Aseles could see the vast terrain of tilting, tall mosques, and towering archways of heavy beige stone. Several rugs and drapes hung from the rooftops of the buildings, blowing gently in the breeze within the deep valley of sand. In the distance, Iago pointed to the tallest, isolated building on the high platform of land.

"All the way over there?" Goofy asked.

"Let's go!" Aladdin quickly interjected as he commanded Carpet forward in haste. Aseles looked to him, then to Iago who seemed a bit worried...though Aseles had could only guess it was because they were going to confront Jafar. Was he that unsettling to be around with? Carpet zooming through the Ruins.

Aseles shivered in her seat, and she quickly looked over her shoulder, her eyes widening to see a hoard of flying, genie Heartless headed their ways, "Um....Sora?"

Sora's eyes looked to her, but they immediately shot back to the Fortuneteller Heartlesses gaining, his arm snapping to the side as his keyblade flashed out, blowing his brunette bangs up against his forehead. Donald immediately took out his wand, but it was Goofy's shield that deflected the oncoming Blizzard spells of one Heartless, Aseles holding Iago tightly in her grasp.

"Faster Carpet!" Aladdin insisted as Carpet obeyed, cutting across the air as the Heartless were in



full pursuit, their mystic, glowing orbs rotating faster to catch up. One in particular shot a Blizzard spell forward, and there was a loud screech from Abu. Aladdin fell back, almost knocking Sora over the edge of Carpet as Carpet swerved to keep everyone on top.

"Hey, wake up!" Sora quickly nudged Aladdin's shoulder, but the spell had completely knocked him out. Abu tugged at his vest, but to no avail on waking him up.

"We should turn back!" Iago yelled, the number of Heartlesses increasing as Rapid Thrusters were now following, their pointed beak of mouths gaining speed to catch up.

"No way! Jafar's right up ahead, we can't miss that chance!" Sora said as he stood up on Carpet. Aseles' eyes widened in disbelief, but were amazed to see him keeping his balance as he shot several Fira and Thundaga spells overhead. The Fortunetellers danced and waved out of the way as the Rapid Thruster seeds were hit, the little hearts escaping upwards to the sky. Sora watched them tensely, but his attention was brought back to the Fortuneteller that was coming up on the right side of Carpet. Aseles ducked her head as Donald shot out a powerful Thundaga spell, making the Heartless rotate backwards in the air from the hit, but it was not so keen on giving up easily.

Carpet finally stopped as the crew looked quickly among their surroundings, seeing the pathway of the building was blocked, and about twenty Fortunetellers readying their Blizzard attacks. The sanded walls were literally curving their prison.

"What do we do now?" Goofy asked.

"We need help!" Donald replied.

"Did someone say 'HELP'?" Everyone immediately shot their eyes up, seeing Genie descending with a smile on his face.

"Genie!" Sora called.

"Hey, what are you guys doing here?" Genie replied, but his eyes then looked around at the Heartless. "Looks like you're in a tight situation, mind if I help?" He snapped his fingers as rockets suddenly appeared around Carpet, each one ricocheting across and hitting a Heartless. The sky sparkled with green and purples, red and yellows bursting in dropping lights and leaving nothing to fight against.

"Thanks Genie," Aseles replied, seeing Genie approaching Carpet at the side.

"Hey, what happened to Al?" he shook Aladdin's shoulder, opening his eyes to see his rolling pupils.

"He got knocked out," Sora answered, his keyblade put away.

"I can fix that," Genie suddenly spun in place and was dressed as a doctor, placing on see-through gloves; "This should wake him up!" Genie suddenly made a huge bucket of water appear over the group. Aseles screeched and shut her eyes as Donald and Sora threw their arms over their heads, the cold water shooting down on the group. Aseles cringed, groaning sharply as Goofy's teeth chattered, his hands clamping onto his arms. Sora coughed loudly as Donald quaked angrily. Iago was not spared as he too was soaked, his face showing extreme disgust as he shook his feather, climbing up onto Aseles' shoulder to try to dry off. Aladdin coughed himself awake from his black out, his chest and face gleaming of the water. Genie snapped his fingers in accomplishment, but the rest merely glared at him for his rash decision.

"Oh, sorry. Hey, what's this little chicken doing here?" Genie approached Iago, eyeing him

suspiciously.

"He's supposed to be helping us," Aladdin answered, gritting his teeth as he squeezed the water out of his vest, and literally pouring a waterfall out of his hat.

"Hm..." Genie took out a pair of glasses, placing them on and looking at Iago very closely, "Helping huh?"

"Why are you staring at me like that?!" Iago said, crossing his arms and soaked to the claws. Genie suddenly grabbed him and placed him in his hands. He squeezed Iago as Iago turned blue from choking. Genie let him go and placed him back onto Aseles's shoulder, her eyes seeing he was completely dry, but his feathers were all puffed up, his tail feathers gone.

"Who's next?" Genie asked. The soaked Abu shrieked and hid behind Aladdin as everyone else immediately shook their heads. Genie smiled as he snapped his fingers. In a flash, everyone else was dry, leaving Iago mumbling and shaking his fist to Genie.

"Thanks Genie," Aladdin gave a smile.

"No thanks Al, you know you're my buddy right?" Genie smiled as he suddenly zoomed off in lighting speed to the opposite direction, "Just call if you need help!"

"...Don't you think he should've stayed to help us fight Jafar?" Aseles blinked, looking to Aladdin as Carpet touched the edge of the pathway of the crumbling door, the group walking inside the poorly kept room. Inside hung broken wood and drapery from the ceiling, the sides of the walls crumbling and letting some of the rays of the sun sink in.

"I'm sure we can take care of Jafar ourselves, right?" Sora encouraged. Aseles stared at him, sighing somewhat irritably, but did not press the matter further. Dust rose as the group walked further inside, making Aseles question why Jafar would even be here. At the left was a pair of a crumbled, stone staircase, spiraling upwards and out of view.

"Time to stop this!" Sora said. He immediately led the way with his keyblade out as the others began to follow, Aladdin in the rear with his sword out, watching intently behind him to make sure there was no sneak attack, and Abu clinging onto his shoulder. Iago grabbed onto Aseles' shoulder, suddenly shaking tremendously as they neared closer to the top.

"What's wrong with you?" Aseles questioned, looking at him with puzzlement.

"Let's go back!" Iago said quickly, terror in his voice.

"Why, Jafar's right up there!" Aladdin said.

"I know but-"

"No buts! C'mon!" Sora ran up the stairs as the rest followed.

Aseles could feel the drumming of her heart beat quicken, as her footsteps echoed among the lifeless, rock walls. Up ahead, Sora stopped, but then he rammed his keyblade against the crooked door in front, kicking up dust as he skidded inside.

"Give it up!" he yelled as everyone else quickly followed him into the room, all hearts beating, blood rushing, and minds spinning....but there was no Jafar. There was literally nothing, but a vase at the end wall, and a few opened windows at the side, narrow enough to only let Iago escape it seemed. The group looked to Iago.

"Where's Jafar?" Aladdin asked. Iago sighed as he flew off of Aseles' shoulder and onto the green, plain vase that was atop of a small platform in the room.

"Uh....he's, um," Iago could not speak.

"Where's Jafar, Iago?!" Aladdin yelled firmly. Iago shuddered, but perched his head up in defeat.

"He's attacking the palace right now! I'M SORRY! I TRIED TO, BUT NO, HE FORCED ME TO HELP HIM! YOU GOTTA FORGIVE ME!" Iago slapped his wings to his face.

"YOU LIED TO US! WHY SHOULD WE FORGIVE YOU!?" Sora said at once, his keyblade still gripped in his hand.

"I knew you were still a bad guy!" Donald's hand shook with his wand at ready.

"SORA'S RIGHT!" Goofy said then. Abu shrieked with anger, shaking a fist to Iago while Aladdin could only give a disappointed face, but it grew into fury. He headed to Iago as Iago suddenly panicked as he tumbled down from the vase. The vase was removed from its place as a small platform rose. Aseles' eyes grew, and almost immediately the whole foundation of the place was trembling.

"Let's get out!" Aseles shouted, suddenly feeling the floor tumble down two inches. The group began to immediately run down the steps, but Aseles halted, skidding as she ran back toward the vase, and snatching the frozen Iago. He squawked as Aseles hurried down, jumping down two steps, then several as she felt the ceiling beginning to collapse behind her. The dust and pebbles smacked against her head and back, shooting her eyes up to see everyone was boarding Carpet, and the doorframe of the building ready to lose support.

"Jump!" Sora called out, stretching his arm out. Aseles sprang forward, the ash and dust rushed forward behind her, throwing Aseles forward as Carpet dived down from the sudden weight of Aseles. The group held on tightly as Sora gripped Aseles by the back of her shoulders, helping her sit up properly with Iago trembling in her hands.

"You alright?" Sora asked. Aseles gave a quick reassurance, then saw Sora's eyes dagger down to Iago in her grasp. His eyes lifted up to stare at Aseles, and she sensed he wanted to tell her something regarding on trusting Iago...but he said nothing.

Aladdin gripped Carpet as Carpet made a sharp turn, almost making Goofy fall off as Sora, Donald and Aseles snatched him back into place. The buildings among the deep valley began to tumble down, the falling boulders evaded as Carpet picked up speed.

"Hang on!" Aladdin shouted out as four hurriedly sat back down, gripping Carpet as it zoomed hurriedly through the Ruins, the buildings falling right behind almost in dominoes effect. Carpet lifted to the air, pulling you all out of the Ruins and heading toward Agrabah in haste.

**MOMENTS LATER:**

"That was a close one," Aladdin looked among the group, "Everyone alright?"

"Yeah," Sora nodded for everyone. Aseles' eyes wandered down to the shaking bird in her arms, his feather completely shielding over his face. Aseles shook him once, calming him down as he then climbed up her shoulder, and perched his talons onto the collar of Sora's shirt that she was wearing.

Aladdin shot his eyes to the others, "Jafar's at the palace right now, there's no time to waste!"

"Right!" Sora gave a fist, Donald and Goofy nodding.

"I'll help!" Iago said quickly, making Aseles stiffen. Everyone instantly gave a cold stare at him, except for Aseles who was somewhat frightened of everyone else's sudden change of demeanor.

"Who asked you?" Sora asked Iago. Iago could only stare in disbelief.

"But I want to help!" Iago replied.

"The only person you want to help is yourself! You've been playing both sides!" Aladdin argued, glaring at Iago. Abu agreed back immediately.

"But-"

"No way!" Donald said.

"You'll only cause problems!" Goofy said, agreeing with everyone else. Aladdin suddenly glared to Aseles. Aseles blinked, only guessing that he wanted to hear something similar shoot out of her mouth. Aseles simply crossed her arms, and looked away. Aladdin was taken aback, but he didn't persist as he quickly rushed through the doors of the city, the others following as Iago kept himself firm on Aseles' shoulder as she followed in the rear.

The Bazaar was destroyed, broken wood and baskets everywhere on the floor. All the doors were shut of the other surrounding buildings were shut, and cries and gasps were heard from inside of them. The group hurried across, jumping over broken pillars among the ground. The palace doors were suddenly in view as Aladdin rushed inside. At the end of the garden was Jasmine tied up, wrists to the other pairs of doors in iron shackles. Aseles' skin suddenly screeched in fear, and she was not surprised to feel Iago stiffen immediately beside her.

There stood a man, red in robes with a tall hat on top, a snake-like cane with red narrow jewels as eyes. He had a long chin and a twist beard, his slender fingers stroking his jaw as he turned, and glared mischievously at the group. He turned his slender body to the side.

"My, the street rats are back, along with a mouse!" he hissed. Sora quickly flashed his keyblade out, everyone else with weapons as Aseles followed. "You filthy, useless bird!" Jafar yelled, his snake cane raised in front of him. The head suddenly flashed with red light, a crackle of red electricity forming an orb. Iago hid behind Aseles' shoulder, and she took a ready stance.

However, Jafar suddenly swung his cane the other way, sending the orb to the unprepared Aladdin. Iago immediately dashed out in front, the orb hitting him instead. Iago fell to the floor, coughing with red electricity passing through his feathered body, his eyes shutting closed, and then relaxed the next second. Aseles gasped with Donald, Aladdin looking down at Iago. He bent down, grabbing Iago from the back, and shaking him once.

"Iago!" he said, Sora beside him. Aseles eyed Jafar angrily, Jasmine struggling to free herself.

"You monster!" she shouted.

"Don't worry, you're next!" Jafar turned to look at her, his sly eyes with entertainment. Aseles yelled as she charged forward, her keyblade in front. She swung, but Jafar suddenly blocked it with his cane.

He shook his head as if scolding her, "You'll have to do better than that!" Aseles was sent skidding back, and she deflected a tossed, red orb. She sent it flying to the sky, and her red hair shot up in action. She charged in rapid speed, deflecting his cane as she then ducked, Sora tossing himself across in the air, and smacking Jafar directly, sending him flying to the side. Jafar

stumbled and fell to the ground, Aseles hurrying as she cut off Jasmine's shackles in two swipes. She quickly ran toward Aladdin as Aseles followed her, Sora, Donald and Goofy hurrying to keep Jafar busy. Iago was still in Aladdin's palms as he stood, and Aseles bit her lip as she approached.

"Is he alright?" Jasmine asked. Aladdin could only shake his head. Aseles suddenly pushed Aladdin's hands away, grabbing Iago instead.

"What are you-" Aseles motioned her hand over Iago and placed it on the top of his body, her palm covering his entire chest, and feeling almost no heartbeat. Just like what happened to Cloud....

Aseles closed her eyes, suddenly feeling lightheaded. She opened them a second later to see her hand glowing brightly, along with Iago's silhouette. Aladdin eyed the action in awe, Jasmine blinking in much curiosity. Five seconds later, the glowing ceased, and Iago gasped loudly, his eyes blinking rapidly. Aseles stumbled a bit in her place, Iago flying out of her hands as she held onto her head tightly to stop the world from spinning.

"How did you-" Aladdin's mouth dropped, Iago checking himself out briefly, and flapping his wings incredibly fast, astonished.

"Argh!" The four turned to see Jafar on his feet, tossing the trio back. His eyes shot around, and they landed on the flying Iago....then shot to Aseles, "You'll pay for that little brat!"

"Not so fast!" Sora cried out, swinging his keyblade. Jafar blocked it, holding the weapon steady.

Jafar gritted his teeth, "I don't have time for foolish games!"

"Who's playing?!" Sora yelled out.

Jafar suddenly raised his staff to the air, red volts escaping as everyone swiftly ducked themselves to the ground. The bolts crackled and scarred across the grassy floor, throwing up dirt and grass as red smoke began to pour out from underneath Jafar's robes.

"This way!" Aladdin called out. The ground rumbled greatly as the sky crackled with a purple storm. Aseles picked up her head, seeing Jafar ascending to the air, the red fog circling around him in a vicious tornado. He suddenly started to grow bigger, his eyes turning completely yellow. A mosque tower from the palace suddenly broke off as it started to crumbled down toward the group. In a swift move, Carpet dashed into view, picking up in order Sora, Aseles, Donald, Goofy, Aladdin, and Jasmine as everyone held on tightly to each other, shouting as the fabric swerved expertly among the dirt floor. In a quick sprint, Carpet was curving out of the city walls, everyone turning their eyes around to look at the horrid sight.

Towering over the Palace was a red, fierce genie, larger than the Palace itself. Jafar swung his arms, throwing buildings to the floor as the dust picked up enormously into the air. The people began to run out of the city walls, fleeing to the desert for safety.

"Now you'll see what a real genie can do!" Jafar cried out angrily. Carpet descended down, and immediately Aladdin and Jasmine hopped off, Iago flying out of Aladdin's arms with Abu hugging around Aladdin's neck.

"We'll handle this!" Sora nodded once, twirling his keyblade once as Donald, Goofy and Aseles nodded, standing on Carpet beside him.

"Be careful," Aladdin nodded back.

“Let’s go!” Sora pointed his keyblade upward, and Carpet shot itself into the air like a missile, dodging around the crumbling buildings. Sora looked to his group, the wind blowing his hair to the left side of his face, “We’ll alternate with Carpet! Stick to the tallest buildings to get better strikes on him with magic!”

“Got it!” the three shouted in agreement.

“Donald and Aseles, you get off first!”

“Right!” the mage and wielder nodded as Carpet lowered himself to the top of the buildings. Donald jumped off, rolling to a stop as Aseles leapt forward, almost slipping but smacking her upper body against the edge of the building. She coughed roughly, but hoisted herself up as she looked over to the left, seeing Donald taking aim.

“Thundaga!” Donald shouted proudly, and a large beam of thunder cut and served among the air, striking at the bottom of Jafar’s jaw. Jafar growled as he swung his arm down, Donald dodging quickly out of the way. Aseles steadied her keyblade, tossing it across as the flames circled around her Strike. It smacked right against and around Jafar’s wrist, climbing up his arm as he winced. The keyblade began to lose momentum, but it fell downwards near Aseles. Aseles’ eyes widened, and she quickly began to run back, catching the keyblade beneath her feet as she skidded down the ramp of stone of the building she was on, Jafar’s hand missing her by a foot as she covered herself out of view.

In the meantime, Goofy sent his shield smacking right onto Jafar’s shoulders and face while Sora leapt off Carpet, shooting himself onto Jafar’s arms and running across, dragging his sharp keyblade at the base of Jafar’s neck and down his back with Carpet catching Sora back safely in grip. The process was proving successful, until Sora shouted out. Aseles shot her eyes up as she ran up the building nearby, getting on the rooftop to see Sora was gripped in Jafar’s grasp. The genie cackled wildly as he threw his arm up, Sora squirming.

“I shall end this now!” Jafar cried out triumphantly.

“Goofy!” Donald called out as Aseles quickly hurried toward the duck’s side, leaping across two rooftops as she made it in time to hop on Carpet with Goofy and Donald.

“I have an idea!” Aseles quickly interjected as she looked to Goofy, “We throw Donald!”

“Gotcha!” Goofy nodded as the two locked hands together. Donald quickly fought internally with himself before placing his webbed feet on the locked hands. Carpet shot upwards as Jafar swung with his other arm to the group.

“Now!” Aseles shouted as both she and Goofy launched their arms upward, tossing Donald up as he flapped his arms. The second arm of Jafar smacked right into Carpet, Aseles and Goofy crying out as Carpet rolled around them, the trio rolling tangled onto a nearby rooftop. Aseles coughed, throwing the dust out of her face as she looked up to see Donald strike a powerful fire spell against Jafar’s face and arm. Jafar growled as his release on Sora dropped, but the wielder was not taking any more chances as he climbed and ran down Jafar’s outstretched arm, giving every fatal strike he could with Donald running behind him. It did not surprise Aseles to see Sora’s clothes alternating to yellow, his two keyblades slashing down vigorously onto Jafar as the genie began to flail, but Donald and Sora were proving themselves not to fall off.

“Goofy, throw your shield!” Aseles replied, able to unroll herself of Carpet and hurrying over to pick him up. Carpet managed to detangle himself, once again the two climbing on and rocketing toward Jafar in the distance.

"Here it goes!" Goofy launched his arm back as Aseles crouched beside him, the shield racing forward as it began to gain more air as it traveled. Aseles quickly pointed her keyblade to it, sending a Blizzard spell to it and coating it entirely in a blue aura.

"What's that going to do to me?" Jafar cackled, catching the shield toward his way. However, both Sora and Donald ran across, leaping off of Jafar's chest as the shield passed in between them. They spun in half a circle, their weapons pointing to Goofy's shield and each one releasing a Thundaga and Fira spell. The shield glowed tremendously, dashing like a shooting star as Jafar's eyes widened. The shield hit its target on his chest, making Jafar hunch over, his whole chest clean cut through as the shield exited out on the other side.

Jafar's eyes shut, "H-How?!?" Jafar roared in agony as he fell back, suddenly exploding in red fog and dust. Carpet rushed as Goofy and Aseles caught Sora and Donald, holding them steadily as Carpet adjusted itself to remain still in the air. The red fog dropped toward the ground in sparkles as the wind picked up gently, making the dust rollover the other side of the city walls and disappears off into the desert.

"We did it!" Goofy cheered, Donald giving a grin as he held up his wand. Sora sighed happily, wiping his forehead off as Aseles rubbed her shoulder. Jeezes....this was the last time she was ever going to fight a genie.

*"We have to find Jasmine!"*

*"She's not here!"*

*"JASMINE!"*

"Aseles!" Sora hurried forward as Carpet touched the ground, and Aseles completely falling off, hitting the dirt floor. Aseles' eyes rolled as Sora picked up her waist and neck, craning her neck to view down at her properly, "Are you alright? Say something!"

Aseles tried to sit up, but a large throb hit her against her forehead, making her stiffen in place. Her fingers turned cold underneath the hot sun, but her temples dripped of sweat. What was happening?

*"You're doing the right thing."*

"What's wrong?"

"She's hurt....Aseles, come on!"

"Genie!"

"Whoa! What happened here?"

"Is there anything you can do?"

"Let me try."

"I don't think--"

"UGH!"

.....

.....

.....

...

*A white room. No windows, no doors. What...was this place? Where was she...who was she?*

*In front of her.....a person in red robes. That red eye glaring, piercing.*

*She swung her arm, but nothing arrived to defend her. He neared closer, but his face was shrouded with a sort of sadness, of distraught. His footsteps echoed in the room.*

*She stumbled back, her back hitting the hard floor, but she was surrounded by something.*

*"Time to put you to sleep..."*

*The walls in front began to close, and she scrambled forward, her hands banging against the inside of the doors. Her chest heaved rapidly. No....claustrophobia was setting in. Something trickled down her head, dripping onto the floor from her chin.*

*"Sleep will do you well...." Invisible vines dragged along her body, pulling her down as her eyes grew heavy. She heaved one last time, and heard the sound of shattering glass echo in her ears-*

Aseles grumbled as she flickered her eyes open. She could feel her skin tingling, but for some odd reason....she couldn't recall what she had just listened to. She saw darkness, but felt the warm sun beginning to soothe her skin, even in the shadow of a building.

"Aseles, wake up," Sora's voice blurred in. Aseles reached up to rub her eyes and ears, then finally regained vision the next second. She saw she was surrounded by everyone, her group having kneeled at each side of her, except for Donald.

Sora began to lift Aseles off the ground, and placed her jello feet on the floor, holding onto her in case she fell, "Aseles, you alright?"

"I think so..." Aseles blinked once, but had to close her eyes as the thudding of her head returned. She breathed heavily, but managed to push the feeling away.

"Aw, you fought one-on-one with Jafar without me?" Genie came into view, his eyes looking around as the fog of his tail flickered below him. Aseles sighed; glad he had changed the attention to himself instead. She couldn't really describe what happened....of what she had felt. She felt this gnawing and persisting crunching of her chest, and she wasn't sure what it was...or what it represented. It was....sad to say the least.

"Sorry Genie," Aladdin said with a nervous smile, rubbing his head as he took a look around, "But man.....it's a big mess."

"Guess you don't need me," Genie started to fly away in disappointment, but Donald argued back.

"We still need your help to fix Agrabah!"



"You do?" Genie's face rose with joy. He cracked his knuckles, then rolling up his sleeves, well arms, "Don't worry, I'm going to make this place look like Las Vegas!"

"Uh, no thanks, just the way it was please," Aladdin answered with a laugh.

"You sure?" Genie asked again.

"Absolutely," Jasmine answered.

"....Well alright then," Genie rose to the air and gave another looked around. He stretched his arms around him as lights appeared among the top of the city, the broken buildings and houses reverting and rejoining back their fallen parts. The Palace's towers were put back, along with the stalls of the Bazaar. The place sparkled, little lights rising to the air with the citizens heading into Agrabah once more, running to their stands and homes. Genie snapped his fingers in pride.

"Thanks Genie!" Aladdin said, holding out his hand to him. Genie refused it, hugging him instead.

"No problem, Al!" he said as he separated from him, and then waved to the others. He suddenly jetted off in the air, "See ya!"

"Er..." everyone looked down to see Iago had settled himself on the floor, looking up at the rest worriedly. He flapped his wings to gain him some air, and hovered in front of Aladdin's face. However, he looked to Aseles, "Uh....thanks a lot," he said shyly.

Aseles smiled, "No problem. You're not such a bad bird-brain after all." Iago smiled back as he flew to land on Aladdin's shoulder.

"Thanks to Iago, I would've been a goner," Aladdin looked at Iago. Iago shook his hand lazily.

"No big deal," Iago answered. Aladdin could only gently tap him on the head as Jasmine smiled.

"Well, looks like our work here is done," Sora stated, though his eyes looked to Aseles once more, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," Aseles nodded once, trying to remember what she had heard....what had happened anyways?

"Looks like you're heading off, right?" Aladdin smiled softly, "Don't forget about us, alright?"

"We won't," Donald answered with a smile.

"Hey, wait!" Aladdin held a hand out, looking to Sora who lifted his face to look at him.

"What is it?" Sora was puzzled.

"Sora, about that friend of yours, you're still looking for him, right?" Aladdin asked suddenly. Sora could only nod sadly. Aladdin could only give a small smile, "Don't worry, you'll find him. Promise." He placed a hand onto the brunette's shoulder, "I'm sure he's looking for you too."

# Fraidy Cat

## IN THE GUMMI SHIP:

Aseles gave a small shift in her seat, feeling uncomfortable all of a sudden. She seethed, feeling a cramp on her lower leg, but she stretched it out of the chair, her arms slumping against the arm of the chair. She yawned loudly and smacked her lips, but kept her eyes closed as she exhaled greatly. She began to pick up the sound of whispering voices, but she didn't turn, too weak in her seat. However....she heard her name being pronounced and she stilled, breathing deeply in order to make it seem her chest was heaving in sleep. Aseles cracked her right eye open, looking at the wall, the eye farthest away from view of the trio at the side.

"What do you mean?" Donald asked, whispering slightly.

"Well, I know I'm going back to Destiny Islands, you and Goofy are going to Disney Castle. But-" Sora halted. Aseles felt her body prickle, her fingers forming inside and making a fist.

"Sora, I think you should let Aseles stay with you," Goofy's voice boomed softly in her ears. Aseles could feel her stomach flutter with kicking hooves, not believing what she was hearing. Live...at Destiny Islands with Sora?

She remembered he had brought up back in the Ship Graveyard after the ship blowing incident...but as Aseles recalled, it never developed further than that, the conversation. If Sora asked her again, would she say yes? It was an odd position to be in, considering that Aseles.....felt something between her and Sora, but it could not be definite enough for her to guess what it was.

"I'm not sure," Sora said suddenly. Aseles slouched in her chair. She didn't blame him for being uncertain. Whatever this was...it didn't fit well with Aseles either.

"Not sure?" Donald asked surprised, "She's your girl friend. What do you mean *not sure*???" Aseles's face swelled.

"DONALD. We're not together. What I mean is-wait-" Sora was stuttering his words. Oh god, what the heck was going on? Maybe Aseles was still asleep.....and she was just dreaming this?

After a few moments, "I'll think about it," Sora answered.

"Aw, Sora," Goofy said playfully. Donald chuckled from the side, but Sora was completely silent. What could he be thinking?

## LATER:

Aseles felt her mouth open widely, a loud yawn emerging from her lips as she smacked her hand against it. Slowly she lifted her arm to rub off her eyes of the dry tears and sand. She fixed back her mage hat as she felt extremely groggy in the night time of the world, her eyes rolling around to look at the lit pumpkins among the Town Square. Not the best place to take a nap, especially beside a Graveyard.

Sora and Donald were inspecting the area closely as Goofy stuck by Aseles' side. She looked over to Goofy, seeing his colorless eyes smile to her with the tip of his nose brimming orange with a small pumpkin on it.

"You sleep enough?" Goofy asked.

"A little....kept tossing and turning," Aseles shrugged. Up in front, Donald and Sora looked to one another, Donald crossing his arms.

"It's still creepy here," Donald said, seizing his wand.

"Where's Jack?" Sora looked around, blinking as he rubbed the back of his head. His shadowed eyes narrowed for any sign of the Pumpkin King. Aseles and Goofy walked behind the duo, Aseles fixing down her skirt and tilting her hat back again as it began to droop in front of her face. Goofy suddenly poked Donald softly on his back, but Donald suddenly shrieked as he sent a spell forward, the three quickly ducking their heads. Sora, Goofy and Aseles eyed Donald, Aseles smacking her forehead.

"No one's going to kill you Donald," Sora said flatly, his eyes closed, shaking his head.

"You never know, right?" Donald gave a nervous laugh.

"Well, we can't just stand around and expect him to come to us," Sora replied.

"And Zero too!" Goofy said.

"Yeah!" Sora agreed, flashing his fangs.

"No, I mean Zero's over there!" Goofy said, pointing to the little ghost dog floating, in the distance of the Town Square.

"Zero!" Sora called out, waving his hand. Zero quickly turned as he grew excited, heading to the four. "Hey boy!" Zero quickly floated in front, twirling in place, then dashing back from where it had arrived, barking.

"What's wrong?" Goofy asked.

"No hurt looking," Sora replied as he hurried to catch Zero, the rest of his group running behind him.

The four continued to chase after Zero as they began to dash up the hill toward the Graveyard. Zero yipped in hurry as the group was now passing tombstones and heading to Moonlight Hill. In a sudden skid, Aseles stopped to see Jack and Sally standing side by side, surrounded by clashing Heartless and Nobodies. It looked chaotic.

Jack hugged Sally, his eyes catching Sora leaping forward with swinging, solid keyblade. The creatures in his path flew upwards into the air, catching the attention of the surrounding enemies as they then charged forward, clashing and cutting against Goofy's shield. Donald and Aseles sprung under and over the shield, a flare of bright fire melting the Heartlesses to the ground and drawing back the Nobodies. Sora came skidding, his keyblade having made a line of ice rink around Sally and Jack as he spun around them, defeating and fending off the charging Nobodies. Goofy launched his shield in boomerang effect, catching the jumping Heartlesses as Donald settled the ones closer to his height. Aseles in the meantime swung her keyblade above her head effectively, making ash and pixels rain around her. The rest of the injured creatures drew back into the shadows of the tombstones. All fell silent.

"Thank goodness! Sora, Donald, Goofy, Aseles! Thank you very much!" Jack said, standing tall before the ground, bowing to their level and standing back up.

"It's no problem at all" Sora smiled, but it drew back down, "But that was a ton of....Heartless and Nobodies. What were you guys doing?"

"Oh dear, we were just sitting here, minding our own business," Sally said, grabbing her red hair and combing through it.

"So, what brings you here anyways?" Jack asked, looking at Sora, "Quite lucky for Zero to have run into you." Zero barked once, circling around Jack's legs as Jack patted his head with his bony hand.

"We're checking if there are any Nobodies here. We...kind of found our answer I guess," Sora answered.

"The Nobodies? You mean those other creatures?" Jack asked. The group nodded.

"Uh....mind if I ask you a question?" Aseles suddenly intruded, looking at Jack. He nodded.

"How come you're still wearing the Santa suit?" Jack looked to himself, and then picked up his skeleton head to a skeptical Sora, Donald, and Goofy.

"Yeah, planning on stealing any presents?" Donald asked slyly.

"No way! Sally made this suit for me, and I think it fits me well!" Jack answered, placing a hand on his chest. Holy crap...that was very sweet. Seriously. Aseles looked to see Sally blushing, trying to rub her cheeks off.

"So how's Santa?" Sora asked, the glint of a child pouring into his eyes.

"You mean 'Santy Claws'," Jack....uh...*corrected*.

"Yeah....." Sora said, raising an eyebrow and giving a small chuckle.

"He's doing well, you could pay him a visit if you'd like," Jack answered.

"Nah, we can't. We got to get going anyways," Sora answered. Aseles and Donald shared a glance, but crossed their arms and murmured below breaths. Well, there goes the over-left-presents from Christmas. Goofy couldn't help but give a small laugh.

"Well, it was nice seeing you, Sora, Donald, Goofy, Aseles," Sally said politely, giving a nod and a smile.

"Nice to see you too," Goofy said, giving a nod back.

"We'll be seeing you guys around, okay?" Sora said, holding out his hand to Jack. Jack gladly grabbed it, shaking it fully.

"Don't forget to about us!" Jack answered, giving a big smile. The rest nodded as Sora lead the way, Donald, Goofy and Aseles following behind.

Sora then gave a last glance, "Say hey to Dr. Finkelstein for us!"

"We will!" Sally answered, giving a small wave. Zero barked as Jack waved goodbye too. Aseles smiled widely as the group began to recollect themselves into the Town Square, but Aseles couldn't help but draw back to the fighting group beforehand. It seemed the Nobodies and Heartless were raging war on their own. What could have possibly led to that?

FFW:

"Come on!" Sora cheerfully ran across the tall grass, his lion tail whipping behind him. Aseles walked beside Goofy as Donald flew overhead, and moments later landed on Sora's back and

flapping his wings to keep himself steady on top.

"Donald, really?" Sora asked, raising a brow to him. Donald snickered as Sora nonetheless continued forth, taking in a steady stride as Aseles and Goofy kept pace beside.

"Hey!" Sora jeered as he looked ahead. Aseles followed his gaze, seeing the body of a lion with a wild, red mane approaching. Simba smiled widely at their arrival as Sora hurried, pressing his front paws against the side of his large, left arm, nudging Simba a bit.

"Hey, what are you guys doing here?" Simba smiled, but it seemed.....somewhat.....fake.

"What's up with you?" Sora asked Simba, tilting his head.

"Uh, nothing," Simba shook his mane to and fro, clearing his throat. Goofy and Sora shared a glance as Aseles sat on her rear, looking up to Simba curiously as he easily towered over the group, except for Donald who met him eye-level.

"We're here to check if there are any Nobodies or Heartless, but also to see how you're doin'," Goofy answered.

"Oh, thanks," Simba said, nodding nervously, though his gaze fell somewhere past the group, "Doing alright, but I do have to go back...to Pride Rock I mean. It was nice seeing you.." Simba collected himself and turned away from the group, his shoulders popping out as he took his melancholy pace through the field, his head hunched slightly with his tail swinging mildly between his legs. The four travelers watched him, go, and Sora was the first to look to his companions, a concerned sparkle in his eyes.

"Something seems up with Simba...I think we should go check it out," he began, his eyes failing to look over the grassy hills.

"Maybe we should ask Nala," Donald answered.

"Good idea," Sora replied, beginning to lead the way. The rest followed, Aseles in the rear once more as she quirked her mouth to one side. What could be holding the cat's tongue?

MOMENTS LATER:

"Weird....there's no one here..." Goofy answered.

Approaching Pride Rock, the rock architecture held no visitors or residents among its foundation, and everything was too still to be tranquil. Simba should be here.....but he wasn't present, even though he claimed he would be. So...where the heck did he go?

"Hey, Rafiki!" Sora called out as he thudded his paws against the rock floor, up towards the entrance to Rafiki's hideout. The other three quickly followed behind their leader, and came into Rafiki's space. Rafiki turned to stare at the group intently, holding onto his wooden staff in hand and using it like a cane.

"Ah, you have some timing to arrive here," he replied in a thick accent.

"Uh, what do you mean?" Sora answered.

"There is trouble brewing among the lands, and it seems that our king cannot accomplish his own duties to fulfill his father's role," Rafiki answered.

"Simba?" Donald asked.

"Yes. It seems that a frightful image of Scar is haunting the Pride Lands," Rafiki answered.

"Can you please clarify?" Aseles asked.

Rafiki tapped his wooden staff once against the ground, but huffed and continued, "Scar's spirit will not leave Simba alone, denying him to take his place like his father's. His father was brilliant, brave, and strong, but the son doubts he will fulfill any of those roles. You must find those three hyenas, Banzai, Shenzi, and Ed. They'll know something." Rafiki nodded as he began to part his way into his hideout, the creaking of branches the only sound heard.

"Let's go look for him first," Sora suggested.

"What could've happened?" Goofy asked as the four began to walk through the tall grass of the fields once more, having walked down the path from the deserted Pride Rock.

"From what Rafiki told us....Simba doesn't seem up to ruling..." Aseles replied next, watching her steps as she walking through the tall grass. Suddenly, the ground rumbled as Aseles shot her eyes up, her ears falling back on her head as Sora gasped. Goofy scurried to the side as Donald flapped his wings hurriedly in surprise.

"Stampede!" Donald quaked as he lifted Goofy off the path of the trampling antelope and giraffes. Aseles quickly dove into a ditch of a hillside, covering her head with her arms and paws as the dirt picked up around. She coughed harshly as she shut her eyes, feeling the hooves leap over her and the sound of cackling hyenas approaching from the distance. After some moments, Aseles opened her eyes, blinking as she climbed out of the ditch, Sora already standing by with Goofy back on the ground and Donald resting on top of his shell. In front, the three hyenas walked in a pace, their heads hunched forward as they snickered mischievously.

"Well well well, look at what we have here, Shenzi!" one hyena replied. "Looked like they were just....lion around!" The other male of the group snorted loudly in laughter, his eyes dancing around in his sockets as the female stepped forward, grinning widely to the four.

"Gotta love those puns, Banzai," the female, Shenzi, replied. The third hyena was left to be Ed.

"We need to talk to you. What do you know about Scar's spirit?" Sora replied, eyes narrowed. Shenzi and Banzai shared a glance, and suddenly they burst out laughing along with Ed. Aseles gritted her teeth, seeing the three literally rolling around the floor.

"What's so funny!" Sora growled.

"Oooooo.....I'm shaking!" Shenzi giggled. "You wanna know about Scar's ghost? Don't think we're just going to tell you."

"We weren't requesting it," Donald replied firmly.

"Catch us if you can!" Banzai cackled as he suddenly ran off, Shenzi and Ed following behind him.

"Hey, stop!" Sora shouted, dashing forward in haste and Donald, Goofy and Aseles quickly followed in pursuit. The three hyenas seemed to be heading toward the Elephant Graveyard, and miraculously, Simba was in view again, arriving near the entrance. Sora swerved his direction around, heading over him to him immediately.

"Simba, we're here to help you, but we have to catch those hyenas first!" he replied quickly.

"Help me with what?" Simba raised a brow.

"With Scar's ghost!" Goofy added quickly.

"That doesn't concern you!" Simba suddenly snapped, eyeing the group. Sora jumped of surprise, Donald and Goofy doing the same. Aseles felt her ears pull back on her head, and it was instant on Simba's face the regret of his action. "Sorry...about that..."

"I-it's alright," Sora answered, regaining his confidence, "but we're here to help you Simba, we can. Whatever it is, you can tell us."

"It's just that...everyone expects me to be a king, the king my father was..."

"That's not true," Donald answered, waddling next to Sora. Simba looked at him, then at Goofy. Goofy gave a nod and smile.

"Yeah, no one expects you to be like your father Simba. You just gotta be yourself!" Goofy finished.

"Be myself?" Simba stayed confused at the thought.

"Of course," Sora answered, "Be the king you're destined to be!"

"The king...." Simba looked at the floor. A few moments later, he picked up his head, standing more boldly than earlier, "You're right...but..."

"But what?" Donald asked.

"No buts! You're gonna get through this!" Sora answered cheerfully. Simba looked at him once again, giving a nod. "We first have to find those hyenas, Rafiki advised us to before anything," Sora said.

"Right, let's not waste any more time," Simba replied, hurrying within the gray and gloomy atmosphere of the corpse field. The sun seemed to have disappeared behind invisible clouds, but nevertheless the group ventured inward, everyone looking around in various directions to pick up the sounds of the hyenas.

"I've got a bad feeling about this..." Goofy whispered beside Aseles.

"I'm with you," Aseles replied, trying her best not to step on scattered bones across the dirt floor. Suddenly, she froze, turning into a certain direction, "You hear that?"

"Hear what?" Sora looked to her, having stopped from being in front with Simba.

"I hear it, they're close," Simba said, looking at the direction she was facing.

"Really close..." Aseles turned, looking up at a huge elephant skull nearby that was perched on a mountain of dry bones. She squinted her eyes, seeing six shining, yellow eyes string right back. Aseles jumped as she scurried to duck behind Goofy, the hyenas suddenly shooting out and jumping overhead of the group.

"Alright, what do you guys know that we don't?" Sora stepped forward, trying his absolute best to keep a strong face on.

"What are you talking about?" Banzai asked slyly.

"You know something about Scar's ghost," Simba demanded. The hyenas looked at each other, and then exchanged huge grins. They suddenly scattered, running in different directions and

picking up dust while they vanished around turns.

"Maybe!" Banzai and Shenzi yelled, Ed just laughing uncontrollably.

"Split up!" Simba ordered, Aseles and Sora headed to Shenzi's path, Donald and Goofy to Ed, and Simba to Banzai.

Aseles leapt forward, keyblade in mouth along with Sora who gained better speed in front. The two followed Shenzi as they dashed and skid across bones and through webs, Aseles' paws smacking against the dirt floor. She panted, coming to a stop alongside with Sora, looking to the two directions Shenzi might've taken. Sora nodded as they both separated, hesitantly. Aseles passed through dark shadows of the clouds above, looking around hastily as the shudders ran down her spine, wondering where Shenzi might be. She turned and stopped, suddenly seeing something rustling nearby. She dashed forward, but seemed to have landed herself in a dead end. She looked at the empty wall before her, but quickly turned, seeing Shenzi running the opposite direction.

"Come back!" Aseles shouted angrily, running as fast as she could and in a brief clash, she was running alongside Sora, the two paths having connected with Shenzi running in front just a few yards away.

"Stay on her tail!" Sora commanded as Aseles continued running, trying to ignore the fact that Sora dashed to the side and out of sight. Aseles kept her gaze locked onto Shenzi, but as they began to make a turn, Sora suddenly leapt from the edge of a small cliff of bones, smashing himself into Shenzi with keyblade throwing her across the air. Shenzi howled as she slammed against the rock wall, sliding down and hitting the ground with a thud. Her eyes rolled behind her head, leaving her completely knocked out cold.

"We should meet the others," Sora replied, nodding as she shook his head out of the clash he had moments before.

"Oh, right," Aseles replied, keyblades flashed away as the two bit into the fur on Shenzi's back, and began to drag her across the floor as they made their way to the center of the graveyard.

#### MOMENTS LATER:

Waiting for the hyenas to recapture awareness, it seemed to be taking a while as Aseles sighed, her rear against the floor as she looked to Simba who almost towered over the three huddled hyenas as they lay against the rock wall. She could only wonder what mess was brewed with that ghost, but her mind seemed to be wandering back and forth of here and back to Radiant Garden.

It seemed that the trip getting all the way here was a blur, with such a series of events concealing her past. She wasn't sure where this was going to lead to, but not knowing was probably the scariest thing she could ever imagine. She wasn't sure what to make of anything that has transpired up to this point, but it was a moment to wander about later.

Aseles faced forward, standing up to be beside Donald at the edge where she looked to the waking hyenas. The rest surrounded them from the front, preventing from any escape. Aseles eyed them carefully, then unexpectedly seeing them grin, Ed laughing softly as they regained consciousness. What were they planning?

"Alright, tell us what you know about Scar's ghost!" Simba ordered, baring his fangs.

"My, how afraid we are!" Banzai sarcastically said, Shenzi and Ed laughing their guts out.

"No more fooling around! Tell us what you know!" Sora said, taking a step forward.



"We know nothin' if that's what you mean," Shenzi said, looking at Sora with narrowed eyes.

"You're lying through your teeth. You will tell us what you know, now," Simba replied more threatening.

"Oh what shall we do? Wait....maybe we don't have to do anything!" Shenzi suddenly said. Aseles narrowed her eyes, unsure where she was going with this.

"That's true! What happens when there's a fraidy cat around? Do you know Ed?" Banzai said, making Ed laugh uncontrollably. What were these three talking about?

Suddenly, a black fog began was caught at the edge of Aseles' eye. She turned, seeing an image of Scar, black wisps of energy radiating upwards from around his stomach and paws. His red eyes glared among the group, but they ended up to where Simba was. Sora stood his ground as did Aseles, her mouth gripping onto her flashing keyblade. Donald and Goody readied themselves, but the moment Aseles turned to see what Simba was doing...he was already running out of the graveyard. The hyenas burst out in laughter.

"Simba!" Donald called, turning his body as Sora and Goofy's jaws dropped in shock. There was a rush of air, and Aseles quickly turned back, seeing the hyenas were gone, along with the image of Scar...

Walking out of the Graveyard with concrete visual of Simba's flee was enough to silence the whole group. Were his doubts that hard to battle? No, they couldn't be, Simba wasn't like that...but Aseles had to admit she didn't know him as well as Sora, Donald and Goofy.

"He must not be in Pride Rock," Donald suddenly said, flapping his wings overhead.

"How do you know?" Sora asked, looking up to him as the group stopped to converse the next plan of action.

"That would be the first place we would look for him," Aseles answered.

"That's right," Goofy replied, a frown on his face.

"The jungle...he might be there," Sora answered.

"The jungle?" Aseles asked. Sora nodded.

"Trust me, he's going to be there," Sora answered.

"Then let's get moving," Donald answered.

??? POV:

The memory....it was so fresh in mind....mocking at his very sanity, his very essence of being human.

*"Why did you do it?"*

*"I had to; there was no other choice..."*

He held onto his head, his fingertips rubbing along his scalp.

*"So you grab her and throw her in? That was the only option?"*

*Silence, but his red eyes looked up at his guest, sitting on his armchair in the destroyed library. Shelves and tables were thrown over, along with the glass chandelier that was in the middle of the room, shattered and destroyed. The red eyes then looked at a piece, seeing his reflection before him. What a shame to do what he did.*

*"Fine, forget that I asked," His guest said, his soft voice ringing in each other's ears, "But still, does that mean she'll forget everything?"*

*"Yes, everything. Everything," he answered, looking at the man in the black cloak before him. He was tall, but there seemed something else in him. But he already knew what it was, he gave his heart to darkness, and that was enough to explain his tall, dark aura.*

*"Why did you do it?" his guest asked once more.*

*The man took a long time thinking, wondering what his true purpose was to do such a thing, to do something so cruel to someone he cared so much for. He could just look in front of him, and she would be standing there, smiling back at him just like old times. He held out his hand, touching her cheek. He suddenly gripped back to reality, noticing there was nothing but air and dust. He sighed, turning his opened palm to a gripping, stone fist.*

*"Organization XIII will be proceeding with their plan, and good thing we already know what it is," the man spoke, his deep voice booming in the room.*

*"What would that be?"*

*"They want her, along with the others. They want them all at once, including you," the man looked at his guest, his black cloak hovering over his black boots. He could only scoff.*

*"They won't be able to," answered the man in the black cloak.*

*"Why is that?"*

*"Because I won't let them."*

*He scoffed. What a foolish thing to say.*

*"Who said it was your choice?"*

*He looked at those red eyes, angry of his response. But he could only shake his head, forgetting about it, "We'll see."*

*"We will. Organization XIII won't stop until the keybearer has completely fallen to their core. Soon it will all be over."*

*"You sure about that?"*

*"I'm positive, but there is one problem."*

*"What?"*

*"It is her. Her heart is the problem."*

*"Why?"*

*"...Her path is far from over."*

*The guest only looked at him, confused of what he was saying. The man with the red eyes noticed,*

*and forcefully made himself explain.*

“Oh dear...” he pressed his thumb and index finger against his closed eyes, sighing deeply. What monstrosity had he let loose into the worlds?

ASELES POV:

Aseles woke up with a startle, looking around, shaking as she rested in a cuddling circle with Sora, Donald and Goofy. The moon was still out, but not even the whole afternoon looking for Simba in the jungle could keep her in slumber. Aseles felt this uneasy settlement among herself, but she wasn't sure what it was...

Aseles turned her head, making sure she didn't wake anyone else up as she got up, sitting with head hunched forward. Her back faced the trio snoozing behind her....but it felt somewhat wrong to be here. Shades and shadows surrounded her, the colors of black and dark blue present in this dark night. Thoughts roamed her mind about...

....Ansem.

Aseles gritted her teeth, frustrated and unsure why. That man, he had everything that needed to be known...And then.....Roxas. She had almost forgotten he was involved in this too....he was the one that dragged her in this mayhem of Organization XIII.

"Hey."

Aseles quickly turned her head, seeing Sora was awake, straight-faced. He walked over as he sat beside her, his thigh pressing against her, the bristles of fur scraping against her.

"Couldn't sleep?"

"No," Aseles answered, the sound of water trickling from somewhere nearby.

"Why the sad face?"

"I...don't know what's waiting for me," Aseles replied, slightly slouching as she rubbed the bottom of her paw against the floor, "I'm afraid..."

"So am I," Sora answered softly, looking up to the sky. Aseles briefly glanced to him, but shook her head, looking down to the grassy floor beneath her again.

"At least you can keep it together..."

"Then tell me...at least, let me suffer with you." Aseles blinked rapidly, looking over to stare at Sora. She saw his eyes widen from her glance, and he nodded briefly, "We're always here for you..."

"I understand that..." Aseles replied, but she looked away.

"...Aseles...come with me," Sora replied.

"...What?" Aseles raises a brow, looking to him again.

His eyes sparkled in the night, the chain of his necklace ringing as he nodded further, "When this is over....come with me, to Destiny Islands."

".....You're serious."

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

"I don't know..."

"Come on, it won't be as hard as you think," Sora humored.

“...That’s very thoughtful of you...that really is but...”

“...But..?”

“I can’t give you a straight answer, not right now,” Aseles replied.

“...I understand. If you ever change your mind...the option is open for you.”

“Thanks, Sora.”

“Mhmm,” Sora nodded, smiling fondly to her, “C’mom, let’s go back to sleep.”

# Preparation

## Chapter Summary

There was a ton of things I had to delete and rearrange, but I would like to say this is back on schedule. I mean...my writing...really sucked back then xD  
In any case, here's the next edited part, I hope you enjoy. Thanks for the support and kudos, I greatly appreciate it (:

“Sora!” With a sudden gasp and snort, Aseles coughed to the side, choking on her saliva as she shut her eyes tightly, reliving herself of the bright light of the sun around. With a quick movement, Aseles was on her four feet, shaking her head frantically as she looked over her shoulder, seeing Sora trotting his way over hurriedly.

Jeezes, Donald could be an alarm clock on his own.

“Sora, where have you been?” Goofy inquired.

“He did it, he scared off Scar!” Sora shouted in jubilation, “Come on, we had to head to Pride Rock!”

“W-Wait, how do you know?” Aseles quickly asked, raising a brow.

“Pumba came to deliver the message. Turns out Simba went back to Pride Rock after all,” Sora nodded. “Hurry!”

Waking herself up, Aseles followed behind the traveling trio, wondering how in the world Simba was able to knock out the fear within him, but she could only guess it was about time Simba reclaimed his place in the throne.

As they raced through the scorching desert once more, the group found themselves in the grassy fields of the Pride Lands, skipping along the tall grass with Donald flying overhead as lookout. Finally they reached the boulders of the tall structure, seeing Nala looking over to them with eyes glistening. Pumba and Timon cheered as their arrival with Simba inspecting the boulders among the rock, attending to the lionesses that had arrived back.

"You should've seen him fellas, like a king he was!" Timon smirked widely, crossing his arms and giving a strong nod.

"It's nice to see you're alright," Nala beamed.

"What happened though?" Aseles asked.

“You see, Scar had Nala and me cornered, then Simba came to the rescue!” Pumba announced loudly, trotting his hooves in relief.

“That’s when we sent Timon to fetch you guys,” Nala smiled, “Everything seems much better around.”

“Everything should be,” Simba suddenly came from behind, and nuzzled the side of Nala’s head.

She jumped in surprise, but returned the affection with a low purr.

Sora smiled widely, "Great job, Simba. We knew you could do it!"

"Thank you...but I couldn't have done it without you guys...for believing in me," Simba smiled softly.

"Aww...." Donald waved a wing his way.

"Yeah, it was no-" Sora stopped midsentence as Aseles shot her gaze around, looking over to the grasslands. "Aseles....is something the matter?"

"...I hear something..." Aseles whispered, her eyes targeting among a dark figure in the tall grass. Her eyes widened as her jaw dropped open, her canines shining, "I-It's Scar!" In the distance, a black figure emerged, a proud dark mane flaming outwards and red eyes gleaming.

"No, it couldn't be!" Simba roared, walking up to the peak as the rest of the group followed, looking over.

The ground trembled from so far away, pebbles on the floor dancing vigorously that Aseles was sure the structure they stood on could collapse. The black flares in the distance shot in every direction, bundling themselves up and spinning wildly like a tornado. The air dropped instantly when there was a roar, and in place was a huge Heartless of sorts, bearing large, two tusks, large claws and feet, and held the Heartless insignia on the front of its forehead.

On its back seemed to be resting a small rainforest, but something...seemed to be sitting on it, bearing wooden, decorated mask. It shot its glare toward Pride Rock, and the beast followed suite, shaking its head up and down and striking the ground with its curving tusks, throwing patches of land among the air. Not to mention...it was fifty times larger in size.

"What's is that thing?!?" Nala gasped as Timon and Pumba quickly hid shelter into the den with the other lionesses.

"You guys ready?" Simba asked. OH CRAP.

"You bet!" Sora grinned widely, making Aseles and Donald exchange brief glances.

"We're going to be crushed..." Donald gulped. Aseles nodded slowly.

"Plan attack?" Aseles questioned.

"We won't know until we get there," Sora looked over, making both Donald and Aseles sweatdrop.

"Simba, please be careful!" Nala demanded, brushing her head against his.

"Don't worry, I will," Simba nodded firmly, licking her cheek. Nala gave him one last look before heading inside with the others, leaving the five looking over to the Groundshaker Heartless.

"Lead the way, Sora," Simba nodded. Sora began to hurry down the peak and skidded into a sprint into the fields, Simba, Aseles and Goofy following alongside with Donald flying overhead.

"It appears the object on top is controlling the beast!" Simba called out, his mane jumping along his head.

"Then climbing up is our best chance!" Sora called out as the Heartless shot its swirling irises to

the five, and then pounced, making the ground tremble slightly.

"Separate!" Sora demanded as the five cut off in different direction, Donald picking up Goofy's shell as Aseles jumped up once the Heartless landed, making the ground rumble even after she landed. She lost balance, falling to the side, but she quickly picked herself up and rolled to the side, taking a sprint around as she began to inspect the grassy exterior of the Heartless.

From the side, Aseles' eyes widened to see a tail swinging her way, but felt its powerful blow strike against her, making her skid across the ground. She rolled to a stop, gritting her canines as she shakily picked up her head. The Heartless stomped its hooves dynamically among the ground, making the ground tremble and crack as if it were a dropped mirror. As hurriedly as she could recover herself, Aseles sprinted forward once more, seeing Goofy ricocheted and spinning out on the grass like a thrown puck. Aseles paid attention once again, seeing Simba crawling his way up the side of the beast, Aseles guessing Sora and Donald were already at the top.

Again, the tail swung as the Groundshaker spun in full circle. Aseles jumped in time, latching her claws onto the thick skin. The tail rose upward as Aseles felt her hair whipping downwards on her head, shrouding her vision slightly. She leapt forward, hoping to land her mark, and to her fortune, she clamped onto the side of the beast, and began to climb up her way to the top.

Above, settled in the wooden, engraved chair sat a creature, again its mask highlight in yellows and green. It held a staff in hand, with dots as pupils as it looked among the group before it. Aseles swung her keyblade finally in mouth, charging as Sora followed beside. Aseles took a leap, but the Heartless sitting suddenly stood, and shot its staff up in possession.

Aseles gasped as she felt herself paralyzed in the air, struggling to move with Sora who bit harder on the handle of his keyblade. In an instant, the two were engulfed in a ball of lightning, Aseles twitching in place and snarling. The force was let go, and she fell on her back. The Heartless spun full circle once again, Aseles feeling herself roll off the side and falling toward the Savannah below. In an instant, Aseles' eyes bolted open, and she sunk her claws into the side again, the large Heartless now jumping frantically in place in order to throw everyone else off.

With whatever energy she had left, Aseles began to climb up once again. She looked up, seeing the staff rise, and she quickly skidded to the side, the bubble missing her capture. Looking, she saw Simba, Sora and Donald encased, and made way toward the Heartless controlling them. She swung keyblade in hand, knocking the Heartless several times as she hold on the group fell. Aseles suddenly felt the world tip, and she was falling back, her back facing the ground below. In a heroic attempt, Donald came whooshing in view, his talons gripping the wrists of Aseles' paws, and began to bring her down to the ground.

"Watch out!" Goofy cried out as he spun in view, knocking Donald and Aseles away from the stomping foot of the Groundshaker. The three were thrown into a bundle as they picked up their heads, seeing the Heartless in the distance was giving no leeway to be defeated so easily, despite Simba and Sora trying their might to stop the controller on top.

"What happened?" Goofy asked.

"...Don't go up there," Aseles merely replied, grunting.

"At this rate, the whole land will be destroyed," Goofy replied, panting lightly.

"What if they get to Pride Rock?" Donald asked.

".....THAT'S IT!" Aseles' eyes flew open, darting her eyes to Donald. Donald jumped at her sudden expression, but she looked to Goofy, "Keep the Heartless busy, and once we're at the

rock, push it our way!"

"Are you crazy!?" Donald quaked.

"C'mon!" Aseles suddenly snatched at his neck, tossing him up. Donald quaked in surprise, but was now holding around Aseles neck tightly, shutting his eyes as the two began to rush past the tall grass.

"Aseles, are you crazy!?" Donald huffed, Aseles running up the peak of the structure when they arrived. She looked down toward the lands, seeing Goofy now spinning his shield on top of his shell, knocking the feet of the Heartless around. The Heartless suddenly spun around, and began to charge, Aseles quickly taking her run backwards, pressing herself against the rock side of the entrance.

"When he's right at your face, let out a big spell, got it?" Aseles demanded.

"You're going to get us killed!"

"GO!" Aseles shot up the peak with keyblade in mouth as Donald yelled in fright. His feathers flew behind, but once Aseles leapt off the edge, the Heartless came charging right in front. The air pulsed around, Donald's wand at the ready as Aseles turned sideways, pointing the tip of her keyblade to the Heartless. A whirl of spells formed midway as the large orb of white rocketed off with quick precision, cutting through the air and hitting the Heartless directly on the forehead. A large explosion burst as Aseles felt her body being thrown backwards, Donald gripping tightly onto her as the sky flared in different colors.

After a few moments, Aseles felt her mind come to, her eyes flickering as the air was covered in dark ash and dust. She coughed heavily as she picked herself up as best as she could, cracking an eye open, but unable to hear from her left ear. She cracked her jaw open, the pop within exploding and she was able to pick up sound again. Beside, Donald was sitting up, his eyes rolling in his head before he shook it, regaining composure.

"What...happened?" Donald asked, his feathers bundled up on his head.

Aseles bit her lip, but could not contain herself as she laughed. "What's so funny?! You almost had us killed!" He hurried over, slapping her with his wings.

"Sorry, sorry! Uncle!" Aseles winced in pain, feeling the retreat of his wand from her head.

"Jeezes, Aseles!" Donald huffed angrily, waddling over the peak as Aseles followed. Looking over, she saw the huge ditch that was created, with the last remains of the Heartless rising to the sky. Around it was Goofy, Simba and Sora, looking up to the two and hurrying over to their spot.

LATER:

"I thank you all for protecting Pride Rock," Rafiki said, facing the group.

"Hey, it's no problem. We were glad to help," Sora smiled, his sharp teeth bearing. Aseles and Donald gave him a quick glance, but merely dropped it as Goofy caught on, and just chuckled a bit.

"You're welcomed to come back any time," Nala smiled warmly, taking her place beside Simba. The four smiled back as they stood before them, bowing their heads down respectfully and picking them up again.

"We should be going now," Sora answered, turning his gaze to Simba, "Take care, Simba, you



made your dad very proud.”

"But when will your adventure end, Sora?" Simba asked.

"As long as I have the keyblade, I'll just have to keep on fighting," Sora answered reassuringly.

"And we'll follow him till the end!" Donald and Goofy answered quickly, smiling. Sora looked at them as Aseles merely nodded.

"Great to know," Simba's eyes glowed brightly, "take care then. You'll always be in our thoughts.”

"We'll be seeing you," Donald answered, flying onto Goofy's back and settling himself.

"Alright, please be careful in your journey," Nala answered, placing her head on Simba's shoulder.

"Alright, let's go guys," Sora said, turning around as he began to walk down the rocky ramp, the other three following.

"Take care, and don't hesitate to come back!" Simba called out.

With a last goodbye, the four headed down from Pride Rock and began to walk through the wreckage of the land, but even with its destruction lying about, Aseles knew that the Darkness here was settled once again.

And as they made their way inside the gummi ship, Aseles couldn't help but look down at the disappearing land of the word, her hands gripping onto the arm of the chair she sat in. Her brown hair dropped at the sides of her head, covering her eyes as she bit her tongue within her twitching lips. She could only hope that Simba's father was still looking after them, after her as they began to disappear into the stars.

FFW:

The four landed easily down, walking into the busy walkway of the Market Place. Aseles' eyes gazed over the moving civilians, but they looked over to the castle in the ruins, its metal still sleek and shining after all the rust it had collected over since the time she arrived.

The town was busier than usual, with new faces and children running around playing with swords and friends. The shops were buzzing with business while the outside chatter collected in laughs and compliments of the day. The sky was a bright blue with clouds swiped among the canvas, and the air picked up nicely with a soft breeze.

"Radiant Garden. Wonder how the others are doing," Sora said, placing his hands behind his head.

"I'm starving," Donald said, grabbing his stomach.

"Now that you mention it..." Sora grabbed his too, along with Goofy and Aseles herself. She felt it rumble, but it could not win against Goofy's whose growled angrily.

"Let's go to Merlin's Study, Leon and the others should be there," Goofy suggested.

"Then we can eat right?" Donald asked. Sora chuckled in agreement as he led the way once more, the three followers keeping good pace behind him as they made their way down the stairs from the Market Place. They began to head inside the maze of houses, turning corners as making sure not

to bump into any civilians walking along. The green door stood at the ready when they approached, and Sora knocked once before heading inside.

Within the confinements of the stone walls was Leon first, resting himself against the wall with his arms crossed on his chest. Yuffie who was sitting on the bed hurriedly stood up, heading to the group and greeting them first. Cid was in his usual computer chair, typing off keys away with Merlin sitting in his red, comfy chair.

Sora crossed his arms with a grin, "Missed us?"

"Yeah we did! How are you guys?" Yuffie exclaimed.

"Nice to see you back," Leon said smiling, standing by Yuffie.

"Nice to see you too!" Goofy answered.

"How'd it go lads?" Merlin said, rising from his chair.

"Okay!" Donald answered with a thumbs up.

"Aseles, you okay?" Leon asked, looking at her. Aseles nodded silently, rubbing the back of her head.

"We'll talk later then," Leon replied, then turned to the group again, "So what brings you here?" Donald stomach rumbled loudly, Yuffie giggled to the side. "Never mind, your stomach answered for me."

"C'mon, I bet Aerith is cooking something right now!" Yuffie smiled widely.

MOMENTS LATER:

"Whoa, slow down won't you?" Leon laughed, watching the four literally gobble down the fresh, cooked food. Unfortunately she had to leave early to head out with Cloud somewhere, but she was sure to make seconds as Donald and Sora were nearly hogging it all.

The five sat around the table. Yuffie had left for errands, with Cid still taking care of Radiant Garden security in Merlin's Study. Merlin seemed eager to train, and was already whipping up spells for the group to try out. Axel and Tifa were missing, but seemed to be handling something together from Leon's instructions.

"Wow, you were sure hungry," Leon replied, looking over to the mountain of dishes that rested in the sink.

"Unless you wanted us to eat dead, fresh zebra," Sora answered.

"No, I don't think that sounds as great as Aerith's cooking," Aseles responded.

"But, getting serious, you all know what's going on?" Leon asked.

"It's time to defeat Organization XIII, right?" Goofy asked.

Leon nodded, "So the four of you have to get ready for it. We'll start training you tomorrow while the rest of the day you can sleep all you want. We've already scheduled who's going to train who. Donald with Merlin, Goofy with me, Aseles with Axel, and Sora with Cloud." Leon asked, looking at the four of you. UGH....why did she have to pair up with the weirdo again?

"Anyways, tell me Aseles," Leon rested his crossed arms on the table, looking at her.

Aseles looked at him back, munching what was left in her mouth before swallowing, rubbing her hands on her napkin.

"It's kind of hard to explain..." Aseles answered. Her eyes averted to the table, remembering what had happened in Disney Castle. If Mickey wanted her to keep this a secret, how else was she going to know what connection she had with Ansem the Wise?

"You want us to leave?" Donald asked. Aseles looked at him, shaking her head.

"It won't make a difference. Leon, I need to talk to Ansem the Wise," Aseles answered confidently. He gazed at her in question, and she remembered she already had a talk about him in his study near the Postern.

"Why?" Leon asked.

"Because he's the only one who knows about me. He knows what happened to my home. But...King Mickey said he's having problems of his own. How can he if he's always running away?" Aseles asked, somewhat angry. She felt Sora, Donald, and Goofy looking at her, a tense ring in the air.

"Alright, so what can you tell me now?" Leon asked.

"Leon, this might sound crazy, but..." Aseles hesitated, unable to bring words to her mouth.

"What is it?" Leon asked.

"Is Ansem....Ansem the Wise....is he...my father?" Aseles rung out. Suddenly a slam on the table jolted her up. Sora's palms had hit it.

"What?????" he asked in question, his eyes wide. Aseles looked over to see Donald with his eyes wide, and Goofy blinking rapidly.

"Whoa, wait a sec, are you sure about this???" Leon asked, standing up too.

"Do my ears deceive me of what I just heard?!?" Axel had suddenly busted into the room, his hand at the doorknob. He was eavesdropping! The little-

"Hey! Why were you listening?!?" Aseles asked, bolting up and almost knocking her chair over.

"Hey, not my fault! I was walking by and I happened to hear-"

"Aseles, how can you be so sure about saying something like this!?" Sora asked, his arms shaking.

"I'm not; I'm just suggesting that he-"

"Aseles, you must be crazy thinking about this. Ansem the Wise is...I don't know. He can't possibly be your father," Leon answered.

"How are you sure about that?! Then why the hell am I having these visions that are just a pain in the-"

"Whoa! Language!" Axel shouted with his hands in front of him. He walked in the kitchen, standing beside, "Well who else was in these visions? Can you take a guess?" The room quieted down.

"No...I can't...." Aseles answered disappointingly, sitting back down slowly.

"We can't risk doing anything until we defeat Organization XIII. Nothing leaves this room of what we just talked about. Understood?" Leon asked. He relaxed next as he sat down as well, Sora copying while he rubbed his head.

"Alright, I'll look into Ansem and see what I can find," Leon responded. Aseles nodded as he continued, "It's midday and it's time for you guys to get some rest. You'll need it tomorrow." With that Leon stood and headed out the door. Aseles watched him go, but she couldn't seem to muster the courage to stand up, now that she was left defenseless in the room.

"Don't worry, he's bound to find something," the positive words came from Axel this time as he patted her back, giving a wink and heading out the door, probably following Leon to Ansem's Study.

Aseles felt more naked as she then looked to Sora, Donald and Goofy, who were all staring at Aseles, a tight constriction among their faces. Oh no...Did they think she was hiding something else again...?

"See you upstairs," Aseles quickly stood as she ran up the stairs, the wind beating along her sweated palms and temples. She bit her lip as she rubbed her arms tightly around herself. What was going on in her head?

LATER:

Aseles had woken up in the middle of the night, and was now resting her head against the cold wall, the warm water running down her bare back and shoulders. Even with the water warm, she felt so cold internally; feeling so lost and deprived of ever being normal around here. She was not one to take long showers, but she was already in here for half an hour, and was debating on whether to stay for another thirty minutes more.

Could something so wrong be true? Could Ansem really be her father? She remembered that dream....of being pushed inside that object, and a man's voice, but she was not entirely sure who that voice belonged to. It was so odd, yet it was so real in feeling....who would actually believe her now, when she's done nothing but lie over and over again?

Aseles turned off the hot water and headed out of the shower, drying herself off lazily and pulling her hair dry, wringing it out like a mop. Again she placed on her sleep wear, fixing her white, muscle shirt and navy shorts. She placed on her white socks next, and hung her towel to dry on the rack of the bathroom door.

Next, she headed into the room, but she stopped midway of her stride, her eyes narrowing to see that Donald and Sora were not in bed. Had they gotten up?

Aseles looked to see there was a burst of light coming from the crack of the opened door of the room, and began to hurriedly walk to it, and picked up the silent murmurs of chatter from down the stairs.

With a huff, Aseles inhaled, and opened the door as quietly as she could, and slipped out the door and into the hallway. Down the stairs was where the light was shining, but Aseles easily made her way down the hall and down several steps of the stairs, picking up the voices that the kitchen walls were shooting out. She heard Leon as well, and curled her legs within her, resisting the urge to go to the bathroom.

"Do you think she's kidding around about Ansem?" Sora was asking. There was silence, and

Aseles snapped her arms around her strongly, hunching over to prevent herself from feeling sick in the stomach.

"No. Her visions are there for a reason, but it doesn't mean she's right in what she says," Leon answered.

"What'd you find?" Sora asked.

"There's no record of him having a daughter, but then again, it doesn't mean that everything on record was typed down." Aseles froze.

"No, I guess not. But what if it's not true?"

"You never know, Sora. You never knew if you would find Riku and Kairi before, but look what happened. You found them. I'll talk to you again, if I find something else." There was a walking of footsteps, a pause, a door opening, and then the departure of steps. Leon was gone.

"What do you think we should do, Sora?" Donald spoke up this time.

"...I don't know...actually," Sora replied with a heavy sigh.

"Do we keep taking her with us?"

".....I don't know," Sora answered. Aseles shut her eyes, hunching her head over as she heard the silence continued for another short minutes. Suddenly, the sound of footsteps emerged as Aseles silently crawled her way up the stairs, and slipped back into the room with the same amount of opening the door was before. There was a flick from downstairs, and the light died down, surrounding the place in darkness again.

With a slip in the covers, and Goofy's sudden snore to cover Aseles' quick breathing, she felt Sora and Donald come into the room again, but forced herself to sleep.

#### THE NEXT MORNING:

Aseles walked down the stairs, refreshed with clothes clean, but the smell of Sora still lingering on his shirt. Aseles sniffed the collar of it gently, but shook the thought out as she headed into the kitchen, and poured herself some quick cereal. It was barely the cracking of dawn, as the dark light from outside showered the buildings in deep shade.

She ate in silence, but her brain was chugging extremely hard with the thoughts continuing to run like a cycle in her mind. It was a marathon, of continuous jabs along the edges of her skull, making her wince. There was this prickling feeling among her, and she couldn't scratch it off despite trying her best to ignore it. Nothing was dreamt, but Aseles felt hollow and cold from it. Then....her thoughts rung back to what Donald had asked the night before.

Maybe the computer was unoccupied. She decided to check it out.

Quickly she downed the breakfast and placed the dirt bowl in the sink. She headed out the door, peeking around quickly to see no one was outside, but invited the emerging rays of the sun along her skin. Quietly, she walked through the mazes of houses, then through the Bailey where she looked over, and saw the horizon of the place shoot colors of orange and purple among the air. With a quirk of her mouth, Aseles looked away and raced down the steps as she began to quickly walk to Ansem's Study. She stopped to check around, paranoid of being followed. On top of the Postern, she stopped, feeling something was nearby, but unable to pinpoint out what it was, Aseles began to hurriedly head down the steps of the platform. However, Aseles was thrown back in the air, her back pinned against the ground in pain. Aseles grunted as she sat up, picking up her

head to see something flutter in view.

"A-HA! We knew you were going to try something!!!" Aseles looked up see the three little pixies: Yuna, Rikku, and Paine. UGH. She couldn't help but roll her eyes.

"Try what?!" Aseles hissed, rubbing her head, "that hurt!"

"Oh, we're so sorry!" Rikku quickly flew over, grabbing her shoulder and trying to help her up.

"I didn't think it was too hard," Paine whispered.

"Don't be so mean!" Yuna said, flying to her other side.

"What was that anyways? And how'd you know I would come here?" Aseles asked, standing up and dusting her clothes off.

"Leon told us to make sure you wouldn't try anything in the computer, so we did! And here you are!" Rikku said happily, grinning.....

Jeezes Leon.

"Really?" Aseles sighed, but made a quick motion as she flashed out her keyblade, striking and purposely missing the pixies. Yuna and Rikku shrieked as Aseles kidded down the steps and the turn, running toward the maze of the door, and locking it behind her with her keyblade.

"AHA! Nice try!" Aseles shouted in triumph.

"How do we open it?!!" Rikku shouted. There was a thump, but nothing else.

"We're going to tell on you!!" Yuna cried.

"Go for it, I have nothing to lose, anyways," Aseles waved a hand, blowing air scuffling out her mouth, and making a raspberry noise on her lips. However, there was a sudden burst of light raining down the door, and Aseles blinked, staring at it in question. She reached, but she...couldn't grab the handle.

"...W-What?" Aseles reached with her keyblade, but rings of radiant light prevented her keyblade from opening the door again. She was locked in.

Aseles took a moment to register she was locked in, but she made her way quickly through the maze, her eyes averting around every corner readily with keyblade gripped tightly. She found nothing else unusual, but made her way into Ansem's Study.

Inside, she left the door open as she began to pace her hands through the piles of paper on the desk, but seeing that they were already looked through. Was this Leon's doing?

Aseles turned to the bookshelves, looking at the titles and flipping through the pages, but she was left on no trails of finding any information. They all seemed to hold statistics on experiments, but that was not what Aseles was looking for. Nothing seemed vital enough to hold on Ansem's whereabouts, and she was trying her best not to lose patience. She began to resort to standing on books and looking over shelves, but still nothing emerged to hoist her spirits up.

With a slump against a shelf, Aseles grabbed her head, panting lightly from the sudden adrenaline kicking in. She had to knock down something, but what if she crushed something of importance in here? She gritted her teeth, but the burst of a door closing caught her attention.

She hurriedly looked over, seeing a flash of red. Axel was leaning his hand against the door frame, his other hand on his hip with his head cocked to one side. Aseles huffed out in annoyance, but she felt ashamed that he was able to pass that barrier.

"What's wrong...Nobody got your tongue?" his voice boomed in the room.

"Axel, what are you doing here?" Aseles gritted her teeth.

Axel sighed, blinking slowly, "Showing you that your answers are not here. You just don't know when to give up."

"How do you know what I'm looking for?" Aseles snapped back.

"I don't have to..." Axel walked over steadily, both hands on his hips now, staring down at her, "Sometimes...things just don't go your way."

Aseles gritted her teeth, shaking her head, "It's not fair, and it's not fair how everything goes right for everyone else, except for me! I know I lie and keep secrets, but that doesn't mean I'm bad person.....right?"

Axel narrowed his eyes slightly, "Define a bad person."

"...Well...I don't know-this is pointless," Aseles growled, crossing her arms, looking away.

"I didn't block the door just so you can say 'this is pointless'," Axel mocked, scoffing. "I want you to see that perhaps this isn't the right time to be looking for this. You have a bullseye on your back and you're leaving it unguarded. I'm supposed to be training you, but I think we have to train you in other ways."

"Wait, you blocked it? It looks like you're mocking me more than helping me," Aseles stomped a foot forward, glaring at the tall man.

"See, that's what I'm getting out of you; you think the world is against you, you thinking everyone are against you, but we're not. We're trying to help you, and you keep refusing it like you're better off without it," Axel glared back.

"Might as well be! I mean, I could just...keep lying some more! I mean, why shouldn't you feel left out, Axel? You're a Nobody, who doesn't feel anything! Why should you be included to join what the rest of us feel!?"

"....Is this what this is about...?" Axel calmly questioned.

Aseles blinked, swiftly rubbing the corner of her eyes, "There's nothing to talk about."

"Yes there is, or else you wouldn't have said those nasty things. You just keep blocking it off. Just let it out, Aseles. Stop bottling it in....you're damaging everything you're working for...."

"B-But...that's the thing....." Aseles picked her head up, feeling her cheeks streaming of small rivers, "...I don't know what I'm fighting....for a-anymore." She shuddered on the spot, shaking her head to and fro, "I don't understand...why I have keyblade. I don't. I'm not strong, or brave....all I do is cry.....and lie, to everyone who trusts me. You just don't earn a keyblade like that...."

"Instead of asking why you have it..." Axel walked a bit forward, placing his gloved hand on top of her head, ruffling it gently, "You should put it to some use...and smash a certain Nobody's head with it."

Aseles picked up her eyes to him, rubbing them off, “I don’t understand....I don’t know why this happened to me...”

“You won’t know until you get to the end. If you keep looking for this midway, they’re going to catch you off-guard. I can imagine it’s hard, but you’re going to have to push this off in the meantime. Forget you have a past, and fight for the future they want to rid of you,” Axel replied firmly. His eyes hardened, “Xemnas will stop at nothing to get what he wants, even if it’s at the expense of others. You are not like that; you are not a bad person...”

Aseles nodded slowly, sniffing loudly as she brushed off her tears, “Thanks Axel...you’re not a bad person either...”

“Let’s go, we have some training to do today.”



# Setting the Stage

## Chapter Summary

A few less pages than I normally do, but here is the next part. There are time frames I need to fix, so next chapter will be longer hopefully. I also added new elements and took out old ones, considering this fanfic is taking a more darker turn than I previously had.

Either way, enjoy, and Happy Holidays and a New Year to you (:  
I appreciate all the support as always, I can never thank you enough.

FFW:

*"Aseles, wake up!"*

*A flicker of light hit, making the girl blink rapidly. She yawned fiercely, feeling the dry skin along her mouth stretch, but then she relieved it with a swipe of her tongue. She was staring up at the ceiling, seeing nothing but white. She could feel her body somewhat firm and sore, from all the training she was getting from Axel for the past couple of days. However...all of that clicked off as Aseles swiftly sat up, remembering the color of the ceiling in the room. She seemed to be laying on the stone floor, and when she moved, she felt the cold kick in around her skin and scalp. The next second, her face flared in attention to see Namine was hovering her face over her. She was kneeling beside, shaking Aseles' shoulders.*

*Aseles shot up, but winced at the sudden motion, feeling her back ache. With blinking eyes, she stared upon Namine's frantic face. Her blond hair shook to and fro on her head, and she seemed to be biting back her lip under her hands.*

*"Namine, what's wrong? What's-"*

*"Kairi, I don't know where they took Kairi!"*

*"W-What do you mean??"*

*"Organization XIII, I d-don't know what they're planning. Aseles, you must stop them! I don't know what they plan on doing to her!"*

*"H-How do you know?? Namine, what do you know?"*

*"I don't know. I'm sorry Aseles, I'm so sorry-"*

"K-Kairi!" Aseles was dripped in cold sweat, gripping onto the sheets tightly in hand. She had bolted sitting up, curling her legs toward herself. Her eyes examined the dim room, heaving greatly. Quickly she threw off the blankets, shooting herself across the bed and gripping her clean clothes. As fast as she could, she undressed after checking she was alone in the room, snapping on the button of her pants and tying up her shoes sloppily with shaking digits.

"L-Leon!" Aseles stumbled out of the room, hitting herself accidentally against the wall. She grabbed onto the railing of the stairs, hurrying down and almost tripping at the step. She shot her eyes up, but saw it was Donald and Goofy eating breakfast.

"Aseles, what's wrong?" Goofy questioned immediately.

"Leon!" Aseles shouted as she shot herself through the kitchen and out the door, stumbling on her feet. She looked to and fro, but began to make her way around the corner. It was there she slammed into something hard and gripped her head. Looking up, she saw Leon holding onto his chest, Sora having moved out of the way but stumbling to Yuffie who was walking behind with Axel.

"Aseles, what's the matter?"

"I-I need to talk to you, it's about Organization XIII," Aseles gulped loudly, nodding quickly as the hot sensation ran down her spine. "It's K-Kairi!"

"Kairi!? What does Kairi have to do with this!?" Sora immediately stepped forward, alarming Leon of his quick movement.

"Let's talk inside," Leon nodded quickly.

MOMENTS LATER:

As if Sora's stares weren't enough, this had to be the worst of them all. His eyes were locked like a falcon, making Aseles uneasy in her chair, but she tried her best to pay attention to Leon who was asking her a series of questions.

During the whole time, he was attentive on her speech, along with the others who happened to be in the kitchen, including everyone she had seen this morning. Axel kept guard at the door, his back leaning against the frame of it. Leon nodded one last time before he redirected his stare to the table. He folded his gloved hands on his mouth, and then released his grip on his face, his knuckles tensing when he placed them down on the table again. Sora adjusted in his seat as Donald and Goofy looked to him, along with Yuffie who looked to Leon for instruction.

Aseles shook her head again, sighing deeply as the last words relieved themselves from her throat. This couldn't be a lie; it felt too real to be fake, too alarming to take passively. It seemed unbelievable, but Aseles felt that it was true, immensely true.

"Are you sure...it wasn't just a bad dream....?" Leon questioned.

"No...It felt like a vision. I could feel everything perfectly in there. It must be, Namine wouldn't lie to me," Aseles defended quietly.

Sora rubbed his hands anxiously together, "Even dreams can be lying to you."

"This wasn't a dream, Sora," Aseles quickly shot a glance to him, holding her fingers out steadily on the wooden surface before her.

"Then what are we waiting for?!" Sora slammed his hands on the table, standing up.

"You can't simply rush in there," Leon advised, "That's enemy territory."

"Watch me..." Sora suddenly began to make his way around the table, Axel moving out of the way quickly and letting Sora throw himself out of the room. Aseles quickly stood up as Donald and Goofy followed behind her. She hurried down the two steps as she spotted Sora marching his way across the brick path. She reached to clutch his wrist, and pulled him around.

"Sora, we have to think this rationally," she replied sternly.

"I am! We can't just be wasting time here when we can be saving her!" Sora argued.

"We can't, we haven't even trained yet! We'll get killed!" Aseles spat back. Sora whirled around to face her directly, his face literally at the verge of slamming right into her. Aseles backed a step away, Donald and Goofy hurrying forward.

"Sora, we can't risk it!" Donald replied.

"It's worth the risk!" Sora replied back, his cheeks turning red.

"Then how are we going to rescue her if we're already dead! And defeat Organization XIII!?"

"I care about KAIRI!" Sora turned his direction to Aseles again.

"I know you do, but this isn't just about her! It's about everyone else, and the worlds!" Sora gritted his teeth as Aseles patted his shoulder, but Sora immediately smacked it off of him. Aseles narrowed her eyes, "Don't being selfish about this!"

"Me, selfish? Look who's talking!" Sora snapped back, gritting his teeth once more.

"You better what you say," Aseles threatened, feeling her hands tingling in rage.

"I can say what I feel is right. You calling me selfish is beyond hypocrisy; you're just looking for answers for yourself than for everyone else," Sora huffed out lowly. His eyes were level with her, and she could feel her rage boiling.

"Don't push it, wielder," Aseles felt the corner of her mouth twitch, her hand opening beside her body.

"That's enough!" Axel suddenly shot in between, his Chakrams flaming into view. Aseles quickly backed up, but Sora remained in place, keeping his stare to Aseles, "Nothing will be resolved like this. You're getting angry at each other for nothing," Axel scoffed.

"Kairi isn't nothing," Sora suddenly blurted out, walking around and bumping into Aseles' shoulder. Aseles growled as she launched her hand forward, slapping Sora upside the head. Sora winced, but the moment he whirled around, Axel was facing him, Chakram pointing to his face. Sora took a step back, but remained with his sour attitude, and began to stride away in fierce footsteps against the brick floor.

"Sora!" Goofy shouted out as he ran behind the wielder, Donald following behind. Aseles watched them go, feeling a dark void entering her stomach. She took a step back, gripping her chest with a clutching hand. She dropped her gaze, hearing the door closing with Yuffie and Leon now standing outside. Leon watched where trio had disappeared to, and then turned to look to Aseles.

"Forget it," Aseles quickly cut in, waving her hand as she turned, and began to make her way toward the pathway leading to the Market Place.

"Aseles!" Yuffie called out, but Aseles shook her head, taking herself into a run, and hurrying up the steps. At that moment, Aseles forgot why she was even here, on what had just developed moments before. Was she officially out of the group? It appeared so...

Aseles stopped moments later, panting heavily as she had stood herself on the ledge of the brick wall, facing the distant, rusted castle on the step hill. She opened her hand, staring at it trembling. She gritted her teeth, drawing her fingers inside her palm.

This was all...so stupid. He was stupid, for acting so irrational. Whenever the topic of Kairi came up, Sora could not for the life of him calm down to see how things could turn for the worse. Honestly, who did he think he was? Just because he was a keyblade wielder didn't give him the right to be such a jerk.

When Aseles began to slide down the ramp of purple dirt, she could feel her eyes wet against the rushing air, her lungs breathing heavily. It seemed so good to run, just to continue running away. What purpose could she have here if she didn't even serve anyone?

Sora was right; this whole time...it had all been about her. They were mean things, but Sora was telling her the truth. And of course he would go rabid with the news about Kairi: she was literally taken prisoner by the Organization XIII, and they already used her once as leverage to get back at Axel, the one who originally took her in the first place. Aseles could not fathom what was going on in that mind of Sora's, but surely it was more settled than hers.

At least Sora knew what he was doing, as Aseles walked and kicked the dirt mindlessly below her, her eyes looking up to the castle that had almost been rotten away. Her eyes transfixed to the entrance, seeing pillars of metal and concrete lodged into the side of the tall hill it stood on. Something compelled her to climb, and she did so, hoisting herself up as she jumped, ran, and leveled among the steep terrain. As she made it to the top, she again views herself among the broken, cement floor, leading within the hallway of the castle.

Aseles placed her hands in her pockets, carefully stepping around the ground. She looked at the scraped metal and glass that reflected her face and feet, shaking her head as she continued forth. She looked up toward the chandelier that stood above, seeing the crystals shining brightly from the sun's rays that crept within the holes of the building. She looked up the staircase on the left side. Slowly, Aseles began to climb, inspecting the mossed area. She bit her tongue, remembering that this was where Sephiroth had attacked her and Sora.

Again, her mind roamed back to that brunette, her cheeks flushing angrily at the mere mention of him. She made it to the door at the end of dark hallway, and opened it as the burst of light entered from the other side. Inside, there was a whole platform of thrown bookshelves, all piled up and leaning against one another. The books were scattered like broken wings, ripped and plundered from their spines. The wooden shelves were scratched and broken, splinters of broken hearts and faces left all among the carpeted floor.

Aseles swallowed roughly, walking forward, utterly surprised of what was left behind, or the fact that this was even here, beyond the dark hallway. Hesitantly, Aseles began to walk over the discarded pieces, watching her step as she occasionally moved ripped pages from her path. What was this place....it seemed to leave such a presence with her....what could it signify?

"Feels odd, doesn't it?" Aseles froze, shooting her glance up. Before her, standing two yards away was a figure in a black cloak, his posture firm, but Aseles wasn't sure....who this was.

"...Yes," Aseles answered sternly, her body turning rigid in intensity.

"I do not wish to harm you, I am here merely offering you a piece of the puzzle," the cool voice replied. Aseles noticed his loose cloak didn't seem...to fit him very well, but she didn't question it, watching him bend down, and dig through some piles of scraps. After a few silent moments, the figure stood up again, his collarbones visible among the air. Aseles felt her skin flush, but watched as the person suddenly began to walk over. Aseles took a step back, but stumbled from crashing into a broken pipe. The person was quick, and they gripped onto her shoulder, pulling her forward again. Aseles looked underneath the cloak, but still couldn't make out the face clearly. The hood was merely too big.

“Here.” Aseles blinked, noticing the figure was holding a book in his hand, but...it was covered in clear plastic, and seemed untouched by the hazardous objects around. Aseles cocked her head to one side, looking at it curiously before taking it in her hand.

Slowly, the figure backed up as Aseles opened the book, and began to read down the scribbles. Her eyes widened, seeing that each entry....was written and signed by Ansem.

“H-How did-...” Aseles shot her eyes up, but her mouth dropped, looking around to see the figure was gone. “...What? Where did....” She blinked a few more times, but as the seconds past, it was clear that the figure was gone....

Suddenly Axel's face came up, and Aseles began to sprint down the platform and carpeted stairs, remembering their training began today.

The world was shifting in colors, and by the time Aseles reached the Market Place, Axel seemed to be looking around the place. The moment he spotted her, Aseles knew he had been looking for her.

“Where have you been?” Axel questioned.

“Sorry,” Aseles sweatdropped, pushing the book within her back pocket. She looked up to the sky, blinking in surprise to feel the raindrops beginning to drop down from the emerging, gray clouds.

“Hope you’re not afraid of a little rain,” Axel raised a brow, beginning to lead the way.

“No, not at all,” Aseles shook her head. “Hey....Axel...?” She pressed her hand against her back pocket, biting the inside of her mouth.

Axel turned his head from in front, “Hmm?”

“....Nothing,” Aseles shook her head, following him.

??? POV:

“Yes...it was the right thing to do...to give it to her,” the figure replied to himself, recalling back the moment he first saw her in Traverse Town. It was about time....questions began to have some answers.

He looked off into the distance of the town, standing within the crest heart of the castle of Hollow Bastion. His eyes gazed among the open terrain before him, still able to hear the rushing of the waterfalls that used to rest there, deeper in memory.

“In time....you’ll see. It seems like...it was only yesterday,” he replied, stepping back into the shadows of the rusted machinery. However, his body pulsed, and he felt himself stumble forward, and hit the floor, hard. He gritted his teeth, feeling the pouring of liquid among his skull. He shook his head to and fro, but it did not relieve the thudding and burning among his mind.

He reached up with a gloved hand, sinking his fingers into the mess of hair he had, tugging the strands vigorously. His body trembled as he lay very still. A few minutes passed, his shoulders motioning up and down, taking in the rush of memories he had now collected.

Slowly, the figure began to stand, sighing heavily to himself, “Does this have to happen....every time I visit a world...?” He dusted off the front of his clothes, fixing the zipper seeing it had gone down. He fixed the hood as well, and now began to move himself deeper into the shadows of the castle, and was then out of sight.

FFW:

Aseles felt warm in the blankets, listening to nothing but the quietness among the room, and the crackling of the fireplace. Her body felt immensely sore, but she tried to fight it off as she looked to the warm blazes that were set on top of Merlin's table, giving light into the Study. The splatter of rain hit against the ceiling, Aseles able to feel the water sliding down the drain and swimming within the crevices of the brick floor.

Aseles felt the snuggle of the book against her side, and she removed the covers from her arms, revealing and laying it flat against the mattress of the study. She looked up briefly to see Merlin was fast asleep in his chair, and Cid who was sleeping against the computer's keyboard. It was best to not sleep in the same room in the trio, for now, making Aseles guess that they didn't leave the world as she had guessed them to do, or Leon talked Sora out of it.

Aseles shook her head, rolling her eyes briefly as she looked down to the fluttering light among the pages of the book, her eyes narrowing to read the context within the pages.

It seemed like they were reports, and Aseles began to read quietly to herself, picking up the sense that Ansem seemed to be studying about...Heartless.....and the hearts of worlds. It seemed...so unclear, but it didn't seem anything knew to Aseles, as if she already knew this deep within her mind. The more she progressed...the sleepier she became.

Aseles tried her best to keep her eyes open, but she seemed to be failing as she felt the burning of her eyes, and the deep inhalations of her chest take her.

Abruptly, Aseles felt a sense of panic in the middle of her slumber, and she shot her eyes awake. However, the book was no longer in possession and eyes half asleep; Aseles looked underneath her pillow, underneath herself, and on the brick floor. To her complete dismay, the book was gone.

"Oh no...." Aseles bit her lip, brushing her hair out of her face. Nevertheless, the pitter patter of rain continued outside, and again Aseles settled herself against the blankets and pillow, the mix of burning fire and drowning rain keeping a steady rhythm, and lulling her to sleep.

THE NEXT MORNING:

With a jolt, Aseles fell out of bed with a yelp, her eyes flickering madly as she looked up to see Axel leaning closely to her face.

"Nice to see you awake-"

"Are you trying to give me a heart attack?!" Aseles questioned, groaning as she began to sit up. She looked to the side, Cid clearing his throat of a laugh. Aseles grumbled as she began to stand up, but grunted when Axel shoved a bowl of cereal against her stomach.

"No way, you've got training to do!" Axel said, crossing his arms, "Now come on, up and ready."

"But I'm not even-" The next second, Axel tossed Aseles' clean clothes over to her, making them snake around her shoulders and head. Aseles stared in disbelief, seeing Axel motioning her to eat already...while getting dressed.

Quickly as she could, Aseles downed the breakfast, and began to dress as she ordered Axel and Cid to look away. With a displeased murmur, Aseles signaled she was ready, and the moment she did, Axel was already heading out the door.

Aseles followed behind, shivering in the cold morning air, but still managed to yawn loudly several times as they made their way toward the Bailey. Was Axel serious, or did he just have too many whacks with the keyblade.

“Axel...it’s like.....seven in the morning...” Aseles grumbled, stopping beside him as he looked down the terrain below the Bailey.

"Since I'm in charge of you from this moment on and the next 5 hours, you will do as I say. Got it memorized?" Axel leaned forward, tapping his finger at his temple with a quirk of his lips. Aseles grumbled, rolling her eyes as she watched Axel leap down from the Bailey. Aseles followed behind, landing as she stumbled back, hitting her rear against the ground. She picked herself up quickly, dusting her pants off of the wet ground.

"Uh Axel-" Aseles blinked, noticing Axel wasted no time in bursting out his Chakrams.

“What is it now?” Axel huffed, annoyed.

“What kind of training are we doing today?” Aseles stopped herself, flashing out her keyblade. She stretched her arm to the side, and then rotated her opposite shoulder. Axel kept his glance to her, but shook his concentration off, swinging his Chakrams along his fingers.

“We need to pick this up a notch. Organization XIII will stop at nothing to make sure you’re eliminated, and we can’t risk that. You need to prepare yourself, which waking up so early in the morning shouldn’t matter.”

Aseles blinked, but nodded, swallowing gently, “I understand.”

"You know you'll eventually have to talk to them," Axel shouted out, tilting his head.

“....Are we really bringing this up right now?” Aseles slumped her shoulders, staring at him in disbelief.

“I’m not lecturing you, I’m just advising you,” Axel replied back firmly, hooking one of his Chakrams over his shoulder, “Now, ready?”

Aseles blinked, but nodded, taking her stance as she spread her legs apart, snaring her grip around the handle of her keyblade, “Ready.”

??? POV:

“It appears...it’s almost time,” the male replied loudly as he sat idly in the chair of the torn room.

“For their move?” the second figure in the room asked.

“Organization XIII is almost at the edge of collecting enough hearts...to complete Kingdom Hearts. It is vital we stop them at all costs.”

“What do you propose we do?”

“It’s time to make preparations. Your friends are preparing themselves for the fight of their lives, and it is about time we do whatever we can to make sure they emerge victorious...”

“...What about Aseles?”

“I shall see when the time is right. She is yet too fragile to accept anything new. I can only hope no one or nothing has decided to penetrate her guarded memories yet, or the effects can be

catastrophic. It must be done correctly, or her memories will not collect properly.”

“What’s the worst that could happen? Would she put to sleep...like Sora was?”

The man’s face turned grim, “No.....it will be much worse. Sora’s memories were removed one by one, when he had ventured forth into Castle Oblivion. Aseles was not fortunate enough to have that luxury. If her memories are restored improperly, she will not only remember, but she will be wiped out of everyone else’s.”

“But...when Sora woke up, everyone remembered him-“

“No....this is not her case. If her memories are awakened abruptly, she will not be of these worlds any longer. She will be wiped out of existence.”

“.....DiZ....what did you do?”

“Something I should’ve fixed....ten years ago.”

“That long.....ago?”

“Yes.....that long ago.”



# Acceptance

## Chapter Summary

This one took a while to edit, but I think I got the resulted I wanted. Please enjoy as we continue to venture through Aseles' story.

Thank you all for the support, I appreciate it greatly (:

### A FEW HOURS LATER:

The sunset was settled sweetly on the horizon of the world, Aseles feeling the soft air warm among herself. She trekked further up the pathway of brick walls, and found herself climbing up the steps to the Postern. Her eyes glazed among the various colors of orange and purple among the sky, with the hints of red protruding further into the duo palette.

In silence, Aseles walked through the metal walkways within the piped building, get lost halfway until she came across the open area and gluing the map into her mind as she made it to the door of Ansem's Study. Once inside, she closed the door behind her, and turned her attention to the books among the shelves.

Aseles began from the bottom row, her hand holding her mouth and chin in her grip, with her forehead crinkling in distraught and thought. One by one the books began to be skimmed along the row, and then Aseles began to merely skim the title, open the book, and hold the spine up, flowing the pages in a swipe to find any contents within, including notes, scribbling or drawings of any sort.

With the crumpled papers she found, she straightened them out on the edges of the desk after hours of searching among the shelves, and then began to skin along the sentences on the pages. However, nothing was attention grabbing, making Aseles sigh heavily and rub her face. Next she turned her attention to the portrait taken down from the wall, eying it carefully. Then, her attention was brought up, looking up to the scribbles on the walls, made with deep lavender.

The Door to Darkness.....

Aseles shook her head, crossing her arms as she rested her rear against the edge of the desk. She was as confused as ever with all this information, and nothing was close to settling her mind on what needed to be sought out. Everything she found was a puzzle, but all of them pertained to the same piece that was missing to be complete: Ansem the Wise.

The more Aseles thought about it, she wondered why the Organization wanted Kingdom Hearts so much. She recalled Xigbar explaining it in the Beast's Castle, but he did not elaborate enough. To be whole again? The answer seemed so distant on why this would be their goal, but Aseles could feel the answer was right under her nose.

So if Kingdom Hearts was controlled by Organization XIII, would they all have hearts just as planned? What about their disposed members?

No....somehow it had to be more complicated than that.

Aseles continued to shake her head in puzzlement, now looking to the picture that was not Ansem the Wise. The face seemed awfully familiar, but Aseles wasn't sure why she would think that, especially after the fact that she saw this already, and she had no recollection of any memory whatsoever. But the more she studied it...the more she couldn't help but feel this sort of connection to this man that wasn't even here. She then to looked at the wall, seeing Ansem's own words written there.

But even a more intrigued question ran through Aseles' head: Where was the real Ansem up to now?

LATER:

In Merlin's, Leon rubbed the bridge of his nose as he settled his other arm underneath his chest. After rubbing his eyes momentarily, he lifted his gaze, and looked to the group standing around him, consisting of Yuffie, Axel, and Cloud.

"Reports?" Leon started, clearing his throat.

"Not too good," Cloud answered.

"I expected more, but she's doing pretty well," Axel answered, scratching the inside of his ear with a finger.

"Pretty well isn't going to defeat Organization XIII," Leon answered, groaning in contempt.

"But they both seem so determined," Yuffie answered, crossing her arms, "Then again....Donald isn't doing too bad with Merlin."

"They won't win if they're still not talking to each other," Leon answered again, "Or has anything changed since?" Silence. "That's what I feared."

"They have to make-up then, we just have to...get them in the same room.." Yuffie replied.

"Hmm..." Axel hummed loudly, holding his chin in extreme thought.

"Hmm, got a plan?" Leon questioned with brow raised.

Axel perked up his head, his hair raining down his back as he grinned wickedly, "Yeah...I do."

FFW:

With a yawn, Aseles was making her way across the pathways of the houses, feeling her stomach rumbling. The excessive training for the past days has left her nothing but fitness and hunger, the worst combination it seemed, especially for the fact that no matter how much she ate, it did not want to stay in her stomach for long until she grew hungry again.

Plus, the questions now seemed to reach the maximum capacity in her head. After studying in Ansem's quarters, Aseles had deciphered of what his projects consisted of, but the major components were missing, and still left many things unsaid. It seemed Ansem the Wise had been studying the contents of the heart, but nothing was too solid to describe what his findings were. In addition, there was no record of him having any family of the sort...

With hands in pockets, Aseles walked in silence, though she stopped to see the little boy named Stan running in her direction. She blinked as he breathed heavily, but regained his straight posture.

"Aseles?" Stan asked.

Aseles nodded, "What is it, Stan?"

"The guy named Axel is looking for you," he replied.

"Oh. Well I'm about to go eat breakfast. I didn't sleep in Merlin's Study last night," Aseles recalled. "Can you tell him I'll meet him in the Bailey when I'm done? I mean-if it's not any trouble."

"It's not a problem. I'll go tell him," Stan replied with a small smile.

Aseles smiled back, "Thanks a ton." With that Stan began to run back his way through the opposite direction, leading back to the Market Place it seemed. Aseles looked to the right to see the house in sight, and made her way to it. She walked up the few steps and knocked, turning the doorknob with her stomach kicking ruefully in anxiousness.

Inside, she walked onto the tiled floor and set her orbs toward the wooden table, seeing and relieved to find Goofy and Donald eating their own breakfast with Sora nowhere in sight. The feelings of sorrow sunk in as Aseles made her way to the cabinet, grabbing herself a bowl and pouring some cereal as Goofy and Donald kept eating their breakfast in silence.

In those past days, the trio and Aseles had hardly crossed paths, and it was weird seeing them now, even after all the traveling they had done. It was as if all the hard work of building a friendship was tossed out the window, with nothing left to replenish it.

Timidly, Aseles walked to an empty chair, set her bowl down, and seated herself. She grabbed tightly onto her spoon, looking up momentarily to see Donald was glaring at her briefly before setting his eyes down to his almost finished plate. Goofy in the meantime had stopped eating, and was smiling softly to Aseles' direction.

"How's the training?" Aseles asked.

"Not bad," Donald said flatly, finished with his breakfast. Aseles and Goofy looked to see him placing his dishes away, and then walking out of the kitchen, closing the door behind him with a small slam. Aseles sighed heavily, rubbing the side of her cheek with her fingers digging into her hair. She stared at the half-filled bowl now; quite sure she had lost her appetite.

"How's your training going, Aseles?" Goofy blinked, gently biting his food.

"Um..." Aseles blinked in surprise to him, but shrugged to his answer, scoffing, "Axel is unpredictable. And yours?"

"Not so bad, a little hard but nothing hard work can't handle," Goofy cheerfully replied. Aseles nodded, though she stared at the swirling of her cereal, directly her jaw to one side of her mouth.

"What's wrong Aseles?" Goofy asked. Aseles said nothing, but shook her head in distraught, sighing heavily again. Talking to Goofy seemed so easy, but for some odd reason, Aseles could not bring herself to talk to him.

"..Everything..." she answered, turning the milk with her spoon as the cereal sank to the bottom of the bowl, "I messed up, and I don't know how to fix it..."

"Don't say that," Goofy said.

"How *can't* I say that?" you mumbled.

"Come on, Aseles. You know every one of us cares about you, and we know you care about us,"

Goofy said, ultimately surprising her, "You just gotta keep goin', no matter what."

"But..." Aseles began, unable to bring words into her throat again, as if she had forgotten the language. She furiously shook her head, biting back the water works.

"No buts!" Goofy announced. He smiled as he reached a hand forward, and grabbed her right shoulder, giving it a firm squeeze, "We started this together; we're goin' to finish this together." Aseles quirked her mouth to one side, looking to him. She reached up, and slapped her hand right on top of his glove, giving it a firm squeeze. Goofy smiled wider as Aseles nodded firmly once.

"Thanks Goof," Aseles replied.

Perhaps...saving this friendship could work. Perhaps, it was all for something.

LATER:

"Alright, since you already got to eat, ready for the second day of training???" Axel asked with a finger pointing. Aseles stared deadpanned at him. How was he always so energetic? Jeezes, it was like the guy was running on energy pills.

"I suppose so," Aseles shrugged, "We're revisiting the new techniques you showed me, right?"

"Yup, but first," Axel suddenly crossed his arms, his demeanor turning stern, "We need to talk."

"Ugh....what is it?"

Axel leaned on the stone wall of the Bailey, the stairs leading up resting on his right side, "You know that this training is for a purpose right?"

"I know what it's for. I'm not a little kid," Aseles defended slightly.

"You have to make up with Sora today, no exceptions," Axel pointed more threateningly, his eyes narrowing as Aseles raised a brow to him, giving him a plain look.

"You can't be serious."

"No exceptions."

"He's the one that made a huge deal out of it instead of keeping his cool!"

"Yes, because your smack against his head did anything good," Axel crossed his arms, glaring at her gravely.

Aseles sighed in annoyance immediately, "Come on Axel, it's not that easy....that is if I wanted to apologize, which I don't."

"Ugh, Aseles, you're not making this easy-"

"That wielder has lost his common sense--"

"Listen, you either stop nagging in my sentences or I'll just slice you up right now!" Axel growled slightly as he snapped a hand forward, and picked up Aseles by the back of her shirt. She wriggled in protest as she found her feet right off the ground much higher than she had anticipated. She was suddenly thrown over his shoulder, her arms pinned behind her back. Axel began to walk, leading up the pathway toward the Postern.

"Hey, what are you doing?!"

"You will make up, whether you like it or not!" Axel walked through the platform as he made his way through the piped maze, finally reaching Ansem's Study. In a fast throw, Aseles was thrown onto the ground on her back. She sat up as she glared at Axel, but saw a mere glimpse of him as he shut the door leading outside, trapping Aseles in.

Aseles groaned as she fell to the floor again. Axel couldn't possibly be serious, right? After a few moments, Aseles began to hear grunts of protests. She swiftly stood up and backed away, looking down to see the thrown Sora on the ground, his hair keeping its stance as he shot himself up, and glared to Cloud and Axel who stood in the doorway.

"What was that for?" Sora demanded, grabbing his head. Cloud retreated without a word as Axel stood before the two, his arms crossed with his tall stature blocking the doorway.

"You both will apologize and I don't care how long it takes. I had a good breakfast, so I can stay here for the rest of the day if I have to," Axel ended his sentence, and then suddenly slammed the doors closed. Aseles' mouth dropped, and she groaned, spinning halfway around and facing the wall as she threw her arms open in front of her. Nobodies didn't even have to eat!

The room grew in tense silence, Aseles crossing her arms as she looked to the ground. Though, she looked to the side, and began to slowly look back. Sora briefly picked up his head to look at her, but the moment they had contact, they glared to one another fully.

"Got a way out?" Sora asked.

"No," she answered, looking past him to see the entryway to the Computer Room had been sealed. It seemed this meeting was planned, and there was no doubt that Axel would scorch them alive if they planned to leave the way they came. But the simple task was the answer: they just had to make up...and they would be let go.

The question was: who would start?

But as the seconds ticked by, not a word was spared as Aseles constantly moved herself around the room with Sora pacing on the opposite side. The two did not share glances, but every now and then Aseles watched him carefully from the corner of her eyes, seeing something had changed upon the younger brunette.

Sora seemed more composed, and thicker in his arms and legs. It seemed his training was paying off, but Aseles could not tell if his sense of thought had changed. She understood that Kairi was important to him, but that gave him no reason to put everyone else in danger of his rash decision making. Despite trying to find answers of her family, Aseles knew it had to wait, despite how much she wanted to just leave this all behind. In all honesty, this was far deeper than Aseles could handle, and she wasn't sure what she would face if she continued to trek further. But, she didn't have a choice; her answers lay after the battle, and she ran out of shortcuts to get there.

Two hours now passed, and the two teens were beginning to become agitated from being inside the same room. Aseles had run out of empty places to sit on, and was now resting her forehead against her arms as her knees held them gently. Her hair draped over her shoulders, concealing her face from the world she was trapped in. There was absolutely no way to get out of this.

"You fixed this room?" Aseles slowly raised her head, looking up to see Sora was not glancing to her, but was inspecting a bookshelf on the other side. He held a book in his hands, skimming through the pages as his thumb spun them all to the left of his hand, creating a small breeze on his bangs.

"Yeah," Aseles replied flatly, "Why do you ask?" She stood up, wincing from the foot that was

asleep, and began to stretch and walk on it.

"I noticed," Sora answered. Aseles stared at him, suddenly seeing him turn his glance around. The two shared a stare, but Aseles rolled her eyes, and began to make her way to the door.

"I'm getting out," Aseles swung her arm, ready to flash out her keyblade.

"What? You can't go out that way," Sora argued, crossing his arms. "I don't find the idea of Axel burning me up."

"What? Do you want to apologize then?" she asked suddenly.

"Me, apologize? For what!?"

"For losing your marbles when I mention Kairi! *Whenever* I mention her!" Aseles argued. "For the love of all that is holy, you can never get a grip when her name is said!"

"She's important to me. You have no right to tell me otherwise!" Sora jabbed a finger in her direction.

"I'm not telling you otherwise! You just insinuate that I do! But just because the damsel is in distress doesn't mean you have to treat the rest of us like your posse!"

"Don't you dare talk about Kairi that way," Sora glared further, standing in front of Aseles, "And don't you dare state that."

"I can talk to you however I want," Aseles spat back, snaring her eyes in a vicious glare. The two kept it alive with hands in fists, trembling in place. "You're beyond ridiculous. I can't believe the worlds are depending on you, someone who can't even keep his testosterone levels in check, and is clueless to every set of danger placed before you. At least I can beat the hell out of someone instead of just wasting time."

"At least they have someone to reply on, a person that is looking out for them instead of someone who just seems to tag along, and do *nothing*," Sora announced, taking a step forward. Aseles' eyes widened to find Sora taking another step, pointing his finger right at her face, turning her deepest fears into reality, "You're nobody, without us. Someone who can't even remember anything but their name. You think your secrets and lies can get you so far? Well guess what, they don't, not with my friends, and not with me! You're beyond your line, Aseles, and it's time someone put you back behind it."

Aseles could only stare at him, her eyes wide in full range of every set of tear ready to be shed. She saw Sora's teeth relax, then so did the rest of his expression. His mouth opened to say something, but Aseles slammed her fists against his chest, making him stagger back. He grunted, clamping his hand to his chest, his finger digging slightly into the fabric.

"A-Aseles, I'm sorry-" Silence, then the rush of footsteps.

"I heard sorry!" The door suddenly shot open as Axel peeked in, "How's the progress going?" Aseles snapped her mouth shut as she pushed her way past Axel forcefully, stomping her way down the hallway.

"Aseles! Wait!" Sora's footsteps approached, but Aseles shot herself around, staring furiously at the wielder as Axel blinked in the background in surprise.

"No! You can fight Organization XIII on your own, since you clearly don't need any of my help!" Aseles shouted angrily, the tears overwhelming the edges of her eyes and running down

her cheeks.

“Aseles, wai-“ Sora snapped his hand to her wrist, but the next second a loud smack echoed in the room. Sora’s cheek ran red as Aseles pried his hand away from her, yelling in pure rage.

“Screw you!” she stomped a foot down as she began to walk away once more, taking a run with tears flying behind her.

“Aseles, Aseles wait!” Sora reached a hand forward, but dropped it as he pressed his cold hand against the mark on his face, dropping his head and sighing in defeat.

FFW:

Aseles woke up with a start, feeling someone staring directly to her, interrupting her sleep. She shot up on the bed, looking up to see Axel was towering over her, his face stern and completely unreadable. Aseles sighed heavily, holding onto her chest.

"You have to stop doing that," Aseles rubbed her eyes.

Axel only glared, "Get dressed, now." Aseles looked to him briefly, but saw his face unchanged. “Do as I say,” Axel said sharply. Aseles narrowed her eyes, but stood as she reached for her clothes folded under the pillow. Axel turned as he faced the unoccupied chair of Cid as Aseles began to dress quickly, folding her pajamas up and then fixing the blanket on the bed.

Next, Axel briefly looked back, checking to see if she was done, and without a word made his way toward the door. Aseles blinked, but followed quickly behind in a mid-run, closing the door behind her. The morning was cold, making her shiver as she followed right behind Axel, able to see her breath when she exhaled.

The two walked up the stairs in silence as Aseles bit the inside of her mouth, wondering why Axel’s sudden demeanor was angry more than indifferent. Since the reunion in Ansem’s Study, Axel’s plan had backfired to reunite Aseles with Sora, and ever since, he had been nothing but emotionless to this point. She wasn’t sure what struck a chord with him now, but didn’t press the matter as she found herself jumping off the ledge of the Bailey’s balconies, landing safely down onto the purple foundation below.

Axel was planning something, and she wasn’t sure what it was.

Axel suddenly stopped, immediately taking out his weapons and facing Aseles battle position ready. Aseles quickly threw herself off of her yawn and readied herself, blinking rapidly to wake herself up.

"Come on, you don't even look tough to beat," Axel said flatly.

"What'd you say?" Aseles yelled.

"Since you and Sora won't bother apologizing with each other, we've decided to do something about it," Axel answered, suddenly charging. Aseles’ eyes widened as she ran sideways, but Axel was rapid in his leap, almost disappeared and reappearing quicker than usual. He chucked his weapon across and Aseles jumped, dodging it. However, her eyes shot up, and she was suddenly kicked in the stomach. Her back hit the ground hard, a cloud of smoking rising up around her.

With a wince, Aseles began to stand up, grunting and trembling. In the next second, she was kicked up, yelling in surprise to see Axel’s boot phasing through the smoke. Aseles rolled backwards in the air, and then hit the ground on her side. She could feel her temple bleeding as she hurriedly stood up this time, and was able to block Axel’s Chakram.

"Axel, you're going to kill me!" Aseles' chest heaved greatly, her eyes widening to see Axel was not letting down, his weapons slamming one after the other onto her keyblade. Aseles kept her ground, and felt the skidding of her feet below her. She kept her position on the defensive, but felt her wrist kicked. Aseles yelled in agony, feeling the massive bruise as she was then kicked from the side, her body sliding and rolling across the floor repeatedly. In a cough, Aseles began to stagger on her feet, gritting her teeth and spitting out the clump of liquid in her mouth.

"You are going to train till the sun comes up, you got that memorized?" Axel said, but not bothering to tap his temple. Until the sun came up??? That was more than 5 hours of training.

"Jeezes, you can't--"

"You heard me, I won't repeat myself twice. We'll train you twice as hard. You won't win if there is no communication."

"Axel--"

"Nice to have this talk," Axel took to a run, Aseles only able to dodge his oncoming Chakrams and kicks. He showed no means of giving up, infuriating Aseles further more of his lack of knowledge on the whole situation.

The hot sensation of her arms and legs picked up, making it really uncomfortable not too scratch in those places. With an attempt to free herself, Aseles swung her keyblade forcefully around, but wasn't landing any hits. Axel suddenly stopped and jumped up, throwing his weapons down and snaring Aseles' shirt from the sides, pinning her against the ground.

Aseles' eyes widened to find Axel land right on top of her, his feet spread out with a foot on either side of her. Axel scoffed in disappointment, shaking his head in annoyance.

"You would've been dead already," he announced, and drew his weapons out of the ground, "Get up. Again."

And the hours progressed.

Further and further Aseles began to feel herself wear down, feeling the injuries increase in full throttle, passing her limit and yielding her to function properly. Again and again Axel held nothing back, taking no mercy upon her fragile body, surprising her. All this time she thought she was ready, was made of stone, but Axel was beating the living crap out of her like all that hard work was nothing, merely sand phasing through open fingers.

Aseles staggered on her feet, reaching for her keyblade. It was kicked away as Aseles was on all fours, her arms trembling with the sweat and blood mixing along her face. She gasped in pain as Aseles slammed a boot down on her back, making the dirt collect around her body. She grunted as she trembled, trying to pry herself up, but Axel was not budging.

"Get up," he announced, but Aseles had nothing left to fight with, or fight for. She was completely destroyed, feeling the tears of pain release from her lids. She was beyond exhausted, and could not feel anything with this pain. She picked her head up and spit purple dirt out, and began to reach for her keyblade that was feet away, in no way of reaching it. It didn't even look like it wanted to go back into her hand.

Aseles felt her arm drop, her chest heaving with throat hoarse. She shut her eyes as she felt Axel's boot move again, and something warm touch her on her back.

"The sun is up," Axel replied from above. Aseles cracked an eye open, seeing his gloved hand



placing a high potion in front of her. The contents shined in the bright rays of the morning sun, the horizon taking a dark orange among her view. She failed to pick up her head to look at Axel, and suddenly realized he was walking away.

"Training starts again this afternoon," he called out. Aseles grunted as she reached forward, fingers bleeding and trembling and they touched the neck of the glass bottle. It tipped over, the contents swirling within as Aseles clenched her teeth together, and began to cry quietly to herself.

It appeared she was not strong enough still.

But on the base of her head, Aseles felt this cringing set along her body, and she squinted her eyes in desperation to stay awake. She reached out to the bottle, her fingers slowly curling one by one as she began to feel her consciousness take her over, and pull her under.

"No....awake," she replied hoarsely, and felt her whole weight drop to the ground, the winds blowing her hair over her sleeping face.

\*\*\*\*\*

*"..Where am I?"*

*"Aseles, are you alright?"*

*"Who is that..."*

*"Aseles, you need to listen to me, it's important..."*

*Aseles could feel her body lying across a table, her legs limp with her eyes looking to the floor to her feet. She was resting on a glass table it seemed, in a white room with the floor tiled marble. Aseles opened her eyes further as she slowly picked up her head, shaking in place. On the other side of the long table sat Namine with a gruesome expression, her eyes staring at her.*

*"Aseles, the last vision was not my doing."*

*"W-what?" Aseles whispered weakly, feeling her chest beginning to race.*

*"Organization XIII, they planned to deceive you this whole time. I'm sorry, I don't know how they rearranged it, but the vision was not real."*

*"H-How can this be? How can they...get in my head?" Aseles grunted, seething in full pain as she felt her forehead throb uncomfortably forward, as if a horn was ready to burst through it.*

*"I don't know how, or why, but their plan was to separate your bond with Sora. You won't win unless you change that." Oh jeezes.....Sora was right.*

*"B-But how are you talking to me now...? It doesn't make sense...I'm not in any way related to you."*

*"...Riku," Namine replied.*

*"...R-Riku? But...how-"*

*"You've been out for a day Aseles, and when you wake up, you have to listen and do whatever I'm going to tell you to do."*

*"A day?!" Aseles motioned to move, but it was as if she was glued on the spot, unable to budge an inch, "Why so long?"*

*"Your memories had to be rearranged, and it caused you to black out. Organization XIII is planning an invasion upon Radiant Garden, and the security system is down. Your friend has been trying to find a way, but he's not succeeded yet in finding a disk," Namine spoke. Aseles guessed it was Cid, and Namine continued, "When you wake up, the Nobodies will be there any minute. I need you to go to Ansem's Study and look behind his portrait. Rip the back and there will be a disk behind there. Take it to the computer room and download it. Understand?" Namine said.*

*Aseles' eyes widened. An invasion? Did this mean that Organization XIII had succeeded in collecting all hearts from Heartless? No, they're just probably buying time.*

*"Namine, how did you know there was a back-up system?"*

*"In the right time, you will know everything," Namine answered. Aseles' vision began to blur, and she reached forward, grabbing the edge of the table to stay here. The air began to move around to its accord as Aseles felt her eyes roll to the back of her head. She began to fall back, the chair disappearing as the white void began to take her.*

*"Wait!" Namine's figure turned disoriented as Aseles reached, but felt her weight leave her body, "Namine-"*

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